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INTRODUCTION  
TO THE  
STUDY OF  
CHRISTIAN  
ETHICS

H. E. BALCH  
M. A.









Philos  
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ARTHUR E. GREGORY, D.D.,

PRINCIPAL OF THE CHILDREN'S HOME AND ORPHANAGE,

*Author of 'The Hymn-Book of the Modern Church.'*

## *AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS*

BY A. ERNEST BALCH, M.A.

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AN INTRODUCTION  
TO THE  
STUDY OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

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CHAPTER I

*THE VALUE OF THE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN  
ETHICS*

HISTORICALLY, theology has always been the paramount science of religion—that is to say, it has received a greater amount of attention, and has had a prior existence to the science of Christian ethics. Moral teaching has, of course, found a prominent place in the Christian Church. The moral influence of Christianity has changed the history of the world, it has been the most powerful of its apologies; but the science of Christian ethics has been less regarded than theology. Why that is so is an interesting question. The

influence of Greek character in the development of theology and the Church was metaphysical and speculative, the influence of the Roman political and forensic; hence the tendency of Greek philosophy and its terminology overshadowed the ethical character of Christianity, while the influence of Roman organization made an imperial and sacerdotal Church, and caused legal or jural views of morality.<sup>1</sup> The stress laid upon orthodoxy originated in this way, and the effect of Roman customs was seen not only in church organization, but also in the preponderance of Judaic and legal interpretations of Christian morality. Apart from the relation of the Christian ideal to the systems and standards of conduct which prevailed in the world at the beginning of the Christian era, this emphasis on theology rather than ethics, as far as systematic or scientific treatment is concerned, is particularly noticeable, and has also had abiding consequences. The Nicene Creed rather than the Sermon on the Mount, heresy rather than vice and sin, have had a prominent place in ecclesiastical ideas of Christianity, as is illustrated by the fact that

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Fairbairn, *Christ in Modern Theology*, Book I. Div. 1. Dr. Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usage upon the Christian Church*.



the metaphysical rather than the ethical aspects of the fourth gospel have been noticed.

We are sure there was a providential necessity in all this, and that we cannot afford to disparage those early theological struggles that have become antiquated. The Church fought for its creeds, and from the clear-cut facets of those crystals of Christian thought truth has flashed its light and beauty. They have been the regalia of the Church. At the same time, as in all things human, there has been another side ; so that many may question which has been greater gain or loss, and some would not hesitate to declare the balance on the side of loss in the prominence of confession of faith rather than character and conduct in church history. It is not that consideration of these latter has been entirely lacking ; but that the rational examination of the basis, the symmetrical proportions, the exact application and development of the Christian ethical ideal, has been obscured and delayed by theological inquiry. The moral results of Christianity have been due much more, and perhaps always will be, to saints rather than teachers ; but certainly some energy and attention might well have been spared to the all-important study of Christian ethics. There has been the leavening

influence of certain principles inherent in the gospel, rather than their clearer apprehension and a systematic attempt to realize them. The specific graces of humility, patience, purity, and forgiveness, have shone out conspicuously. The religious virtues of faith, hope, and love have been at work. The inwardness of moral worth has been more or less recognized, but the only rational interpretation of the revelation of Jesus Christ to the world ethically in the middle ages was through the medium of devotional manuals of a confessional type,<sup>1</sup> with their tendency to casuistical and limited practical treatment of morals. The Church was the seat and standard of authority, and its work administrative in intention rather than scientific, its theory theological rather than philosophical. Doubtless these moral directions were educative in their subtlety of discernment, and eminently practical counsels, but their unsatisfactory character was fully demonstrated in the moral condition of pre-Reformation Christianity, and the moral significance of the Reformation itself, as also later in the probabilism of Jesuitical casuistry.

English Protestantism, with its biblical and individual view of life, has mainly been char-

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Dan Michel's *Ayenbite of Inwyte* (Remorse of Conscience).

acterized as far as distinctly moral teaching is concerned by its christianization of the Jewish code of the Ten Commandments, and generally by gnostic use of New Testament teaching—i.e. its precepts have been enforced rather than its principles investigated. Moral philosophy has had its own work, and its Christian champions of that which is essential to the recognition of moral obligation. When Hobbes put forward his theory of universal selfishness, and afterwards when it received the modifications of utilitarian writers, there were those who defended the specific elements of morality—viz. the Cambridge moralists, intuitionists, and others.<sup>1</sup> The names of Bishop Butler and Dr. James Martineau are well known. We have even utilitarian theologians like Paley. But the distinct character and position of such writers has been to maintain the sacredness of conscience or its independence, or the integrity of other-regarding sentiments, rather than to develop a system of specifically Christian ethics.

The work of a systematic interpretation of the Christian theory of life in regard to human character and conduct has stopped short at this point.

Of course, the Christian interest is inextricably interwoven in the controversies referred to, and the problems are handed on from associationist

<sup>1</sup> Vide Sidgwick, *History of Ethics*.

and intuitionist to the evolutionist and transcendentalist, with their conflicting views of ethics. The positions of Herbert Spencer, Leslie Stephen, and Alexander on the one hand, Kant, Hegel, and T. H. Green on the other, must alike be considered by any one who would do justice to the subject of Christian ethics ; but to put Christian ethics into such a form that its relation to philosophical systems and yet distinctive features may be fairly apprehended is a task by itself. At least, it is a mode of approaching the study of ethics which has peculiar attraction and pressing need.

In this direction translations of works like those of Wuttke, Harless, Martensen, Dorner, are read by those who have time and opportunity, while Dr. Newman Smyth's *Christian Ethics* was a new departure in this all-important topic, as far as English authorship is concerned. It is, however, at a level not easily reached at once. There are also Maurice's lectures, Dr. Findlay's Fernley Lecture on *Christian Doctrine and Morals*, and Dr. Davison's on *The Christian Conscience*, and many other fragmentary contributions to the subject. But if the relation of Christian ethics and theology were more clearly and fully seen, the study of both would be enriched and ethics would receive more universal

attention ; and if the subject of Christian ethics could be brought to some comprehensive and systematic treatment the gain would be great.

What human life needs more than ever is a theory that shall do justice to the individual personality and the essential features of moral consciousness ; a theory of life at the same time logical and consistent in its principles, and comprehensive in its applications to the multitudinous social relations of mankind. That can be supplied in no other way, we are sure, than from a deeper insight into Christian character and its philosophical basis, and no adequate justice can be done to theology itself without considering such ethical questions. As soon as the need is stated it may be asked whether it is possible to formulate at the present time the ethical principles of Christianity in any way comparable to the dogmas and doctrines of theology ; whether it is possible to put such systematic teaching into introductory form ; still more whether the mutual relation of interdependence between the two spheres of Christian study, ethics and theology, is clear and accepted. It is an end to be desired, and possibly attained. A certain uniformity of Christian endeavour, and a vindication both of ethical ideal and theological doctrine, may result. Definitions, catechetical answers to questions of

a theological kind, prevail more or less from the infant class in the Sunday school to the testing of candidates for ordination ; yet the ethical teaching of the New Testament, which to even a boy must seem in some cases paradoxical, is usually left to the ingenious or 'common sense' reconciliation of the individual or a self-chosen referee.

There is coming to be recognized a far more radical and less haphazard harmony. There is a natural and inevitable reconciliation, an interpretation according to the analogy of duty, in matters of ethics, as well as according to the 'analogy of faith' in matters of doctrine.

Further, if the Christian ideal is to vindicate itself before the apparent simplicity and consistency of material and lower standards of morality current, it is needful to emphasize the force of its logical completeness. Now, if ever, the Christian is spurred on to regard the social relations of life in all their fullness, and such matters cannot be left to a babel of opinion. It is inconceivable that the revelation of Jesus Christ has no message. The crudity of answers to the misleading question, 'What would Jesus do?' is an illustration of the unintelligent hunger for a more systematic interpretation of the Christian ethical principles and their founda-

tion. It might be replied that is the duty of the pulpit, and the preacher is the man who must make the interpretation. Never was it more generally attempted; but a sermon is of necessity a fragment called forth by the demand of the moment, and it may be questioned whether some who may feel that immediate call most strongly, and respond to it most forcefully, have regarded the mutual correspondence of sometimes antagonistic aspects of that which they conceive to be Christian duty. The moral judgement or sentiment of the hearers may or may not be in accord with any particular enforcement, and a reconciliation with apparently conflicting or contrary admonitions is generally waived. No doubt a large number of Christian preachers have arrived at fundamental and systematic conceptions of Christian ethics. If the circle could be widened it would be a great gain.

Apologetically, ethics has a prior appeal to theology—that is to say, the primary theological questions presuppose ethical ideas, and ethics has its own history as a science. It is both the parent and the child of philosophic systems. Its importance, therefore, can hardly be exaggerated.

The questions arising out of thought about conduct, the meaning of the distinction between



right and wrong, good and evil, the meaning of obligation, the standard of virtue, lead directly to questions regarding ideas of human life, the universe, and God, which are deeply rooted in the moral nature of mankind. But if our inquiry originate in a line of thought less clearly practical than what is right and wrong, and why is an action right or wrong; if the order of the natural world first claims attention, and some explanation of what we see has been offered: yet no philosophical system can be complete till it has taken into account the facts of man's moral nature. With whatever violence to the theoretical explanation of external phenomena, or the phenomena of moral consciousness, there must be some show of concord between them, some reconciliation between the natural and moral, necessity and freedom. In criticizing any theory offered, and in offering its own, Christianity appeals for a verdict to the best reason of mankind, and presupposes therefore a capacity to respond because of 'the light which lighteneth every man coming into the world' (John i. 9).

'Our knowledge of the supreme excellence, our best evidence even of the existence of the Creator, is derived not from the material universe, but from our own moral nature.' Or, as the



same writer says : ' The theory which teaches that the arbitrary will of the Deity is the one rule of morals, and the anticipation of future rewards and punishments the one reason for conforming to it, consists of two parts : the first annihilates the goodness of God, the second the virtue of man.'<sup>1</sup>

But the fact that the appeal of religion presupposes ethical ideas must not be taken to suggest legitimate independence. It is perfectly impossible to find any adequate ground for theology apart from ethics, but it is equally impossible adequately to solve ethical problems apart from theological considerations.

' The reality of the moral nature is the primary basis of natural theology, and without such personal relation to God as it involves, the question of a first cause becomes a mere matter of archaeology, and religion a question of poetic imagination.'<sup>2</sup>

It is true, again, that the claims of ethical notions may be enforced upon those who deny the existence of God and immortality, and it is certain that there are those whose lives conform to the moral claims of the society in which they live, who disregard these higher considerations

<sup>1</sup> Lecky, *History of European Morals* I. 55

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

involved in ethics ; but it is just because of the conviction that non-theistic systems do violence to the essential character of ethical ideas and emotions, and fail to explain the peculiar exercise of volition in consciously good and bad conduct, that the aid of theology finds a welcome in religious minds. Hence arises the question of the relation of Christian theology to Christian ethics.

The facts of Christian ethics are found in Christian moral consciousness.

‘It is the science,’ says Dr. Newman Smyth, ‘of the moral content, progress, and ends of human life under the formative Christian ideal. It is ethics raised to the highest power, the last and fullest interpretation of the world and its history.’ Thus, while coinciding with much in scientific as distinguished from Christian ethics and claiming their ultimate and real harmony, Christian ethics assumes to judge scientific theories and provide its own authority, standard, and motive. The authority, standard, and motive of Christian ethics are in close relation to theology. But the service of Christian ethics is not to be restricted to a subordinate section of theology. In actual human progress it may assert itself against an error of theology. Theological doctrine must commend itself to the

Christian moral sense. 'The truth as it is in Jesus commends itself to the sanctified reason and enlightened conscience ; both faculties are to be intelligently and simultaneously used, and the exercise of Christian conscience may be a salutary check on speculation. But it must itself be guided, restrained, or stimulated by Christian doctrine.'<sup>1</sup> Still, it may be remarked that, even if doctrine and practice be thus married, it does not follow it will always be manifest which should be corrective, and Christian ethics and Christian doctrine alike find their union in Jesus Christ as the effulgence of divine glory the very image of divine truth. He is the final court of appeal.

But without anticipating the subject further, it is the business of Christian ethics :

(1) To exhibit the agreement and contrast of its theory with the general ethical ideas of mankind.

(2) To show its relation to such aspects of Christian theology as have unmistakable ethical import.

(3) Associated with these two tasks is the yet further duty of explicit practical application of Christian principles to the actual existing ethical relations of the individual.

<sup>1</sup> Davison, *The Christian Interpretation of Life*, Lect. IX.

The more our lives are ordered rationally, the more shall we seek not merely to accept certain maxims and rules, but rather to discern those truths upon which they are based, to correct irregularities that may have arisen from other influences. 'Knowledge is power' in morals as well as nature, and the man who has grasped the inner significance of Christian moral teaching will act, other things being equal, with greater consistency, and enforce such teaching with greater effectiveness. To seek order and harmony is the cure for slovenliness, prejudice, confusion, censoriousness, and superficiality in teaching Christian duty. Order and harmony in this case means the knowledge of such system and science as has commended itself to the best judgement of mankind in the study of ethics and of Christian ethics.

## CHAPTER II

### *CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND OTHER FIELDS OF THOUGHT*

THE first duty in the study of any particular branch of human inquiry is to mark off as far as possible its limits in relation to other fields of thought. Unless this be done confusion may arise. A certain standpoint must be recognized, and as a preliminary necessity in any study it must be understood what legitimately belongs to the subject in hand.

In considering the relation of Christian ethics to other sciences a description of its own claims will emerge, as well as a mapping out as far as may be of the neighbouring regions of systematized knowledge.

The first and most obvious contrast is—

1. *Christian ethics in relation to positive or concrete sciences.*<sup>1</sup> When we claim that

<sup>1</sup> Muirhead, *Elements of Ethics*, p. 30; Mackenzie, *Manual of Ethics*, Chap. I. & II.

Christian ethics is a science, this does not mean that there is for investigation a certain class of objects as clearly marked off as in ordinary positive sciences. The objects of such sciences as astronomy, geology, botany, or biology are clearly distinguished. Stars, rocks, plants, and living organisms are not generally confused together. Besides which, in the second place, the purpose of such sciences is to describe the uniformities of our experience in regard to the phenomena with which they deal.

Now the phenomena of the science of Christian ethics admit of no such classification according to easily noticed external appearance, neither is the chief or real end a description and analysis of certain regular processes. Its range is as wide, its subject-matter as various and uncertain, as human conduct ; and it considers that conduct from its own particular point of view.

Thus, for example, a man is killed. That event may be the subject of inquiry as to the physiological cause of death, or the mechanical means whereby the man was killed, or the historical or political significance of the man's death. But if the inquiry refer to the condemnation or otherwise of the individual through whose action the man was killed, we approach the subject of Christian ethics. It may be said

that such an incident is a matter for investigation according to criminal law or political justice. That may be true ; yet these involve ethical principles, and may even be in contrast with Christian ethical principles, as a standard for judging conduct. Ethics goes behind criminal codes, to consider the nature and basis of right and wrong. Ethics is only concerned with the concrete sciences as far as human conduct is conditioned by physical limitations, and material circumstances form the occasions of duty. It is characterized by the moral aspects of events, and is concerned with the formulating of general truths concerning conduct.

We shall have to notice how ethics may be treated by a similar method to positive science ; but in its wide range as a theory of life it is more akin to philosophy than ordinary science, and would take its place among philosophical sciences. It takes account of man as a conscious agent, and aims at being regulative of his actions. Any system of ethics so called which overlooks the specific importance of these characteristics of the science would be specially repugnant to Christian thought, which assumes and enforces the distinctive ethical features of human nature in the light of Christian teaching. Man as a conscious agent does not reveal the

uniformity of action found in natural phenomena. No attempt to anticipate the course of individual action, as the action of chemicals or the course of planets can be anticipated, has succeeded; neither is such a method in harmony with the actual consciousness of mankind. Any such attempt only emphasizes the problem which belongs to ethical inquiry, by its failure and deficiency.

2. *Christian ethics is not primarily a practical science.* Referring to the illustration given above, the business of Christian ethics is not to deal with the question of the verdict to be passed on the violent death of a particular man, but with the standard according to which the law is framed and in harmony with which judgement is given. The results arrived at by ethics lead inevitably to practical application; as, indeed, most sciences have some practical application—as, for example, medicine and hygiene, architecture, and rhetoric. In fact, such possibility is the measure of their use.

In some sciences, however, the practical application is more remote than those named. They are more abstract, and they lie behind practical sciences. So the *primary* purpose of ethics is rather theoretic than practical. It seeks to arrive at principles or laws applicable



to particular cases. Christian ethics is so far committed to this practical application that it is concerned to show the harmony of its teaching and the significance of its ideal in all directions and relations of an ethical kind ; but *primarily* its business is to define its fundamental principles, and to show their relation to human inquiry of a theoretic kind.

The name 'ethics' is derived from the Greek word *ἦθος* which means character, and is connected with *ἔθος*, custom or habit. As the science of character it goes behind individual acts, and deeper than outward behaviour, to consider the general foundation and springs of action. Christian ethics forms, therefore, a link between religion and definite action, inasmuch as the Christian religion has to do with a world of experience and thought in close contact with conduct, and is concerned with the development of that character in individuals the ideal standard and requirement of which Christian ethics undertakes to describe.

3. *Christian ethics is a normative or regulative science.* It is concerned with a 'norm,' a standard or ideal. Contrast with the abstract science of mathematics may help us to see the true nature of a normative science. Mathematics is the abstract science of natural phenomena as

far as space and number are concerned. It determines the modes of measurements with which actual natural phenomena and processes may be expected to conform. But the regulative or normative sciences deal with human nature, and instead of describing the modes of action that may be expected, they describe that with which human action *ought* to conform.

The normative sciences are logic, aesthetics, and ethics; and their ideals are the true, the beautiful, and the good, respectively. Logic describes the processes of thought to which reasoning should conform, and is a valuable mental discipline preparatory to all exactness of reasoning, which gives it a primary importance intellectually. But the obligation of intellectual exactness is limited, even as a duty, only to a part of ethical obligation. It may be regarded as dependent upon ethical obligation, since truth is an ethical ideal fundamentally. But as far as a classification of sciences is concerned, knowledge and virtue are not identical, and ethics claims the wider and inclusive area of authority as the 'logic of conduct.'<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, aesthetics is a regulative science, but can never be made exactly parallel with ethics. It is the science of the beautiful, and

<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie's *Manual*, p. 28.

regulative of art and taste. Metaphorically we speak of beautiful acts, or the 'beauty of holiness,'<sup>1</sup> and the Greeks identified the good and the beautiful<sup>2</sup>; there is, however, in ethics a stronger sense of obligation and universality of authority than in aesthetics. Indeed, ethical considerations should enter into aesthetics in a similar way to that in which they affect the use of logic; but morality itself is no mere matter of taste or preference. Though, as we have seen, not at first 'practical,' it is pre-eminently related to the exercise of 'practical reason,'<sup>3</sup> and is of universal disciplinary bearing, since character and conduct are of importance to all men, while aesthetics has only a limited and conditional obligation.

All this is peculiarly true of Christian ethics. It is possible for ethical inquiry to be conducted in such a fashion as to be merely descriptive of the moral judgements according to local and temporal variation. So-called ethics of that kind is part of the natural history of man or anthropology. It becomes partly psychological and partly a branch of sociology; but if so limited, it is at the sacrifice of its specific ethical character. There are schemes of ethics which

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xcvi. 9; lxxxix. 17.

<sup>2</sup> καλὸν καγαθόν

<sup>3</sup> *Kant's Theory of Ethics* (Longmans, Green & Co.).

seem to explain away rather than explain the distinctly ethical obligation. But Christian ethics certainly insists on the universal authority of its conclusions, and in its practical applications the Christian religion is specially complete. It starts with certain assumptions of a philosophical and theological kind; it comes into contrast and antagonism with certain schemes of moral philosophy: but it is prepared to vindicate its claims and authority by an appeal to the moral consciousness of all mankind.

Having thus described the position of Christian ethics among the sciences as far as it is possible to classify them roughly with regard to their predominant characteristics, it is necessary to consider in what relation Christian ethics stand to *kindred or auxiliary methods of thought*. By the term auxiliary no subordination is necessarily implied, only, relatively to the science with which we have to do, certain other methods of thought may be so termed. In this connexion, too, it will be our business to note certain postulates or preliminary assumptions which Christian ethics takes over from some of these auxiliaries, and the complete justification of which must in a large measure be referred to them.

1. *Philosophy*,<sup>1</sup> or *Metaphysics*. It has sometimes been attempted to disregard the essential place of metaphysics in philosophy. Philosophy is 'the science of the universe, not according to its details, but according to the principles which condition all particulars' (Ueberweg). It is the progressive systematization of principles presupposed and ascertained in particular sciences in their relation to ultimate reality. In this way it has been treated both as a science of knowledge and as a science of being; but they cannot be ultimately separated. 'The perpetual sharpening of the knife becomes tiresome, if after all we have nothing to cut with it' (Lotze).

No theory of morals can ignore the question of ultimate reality behind the phenomena of moral life, and the world as the scene of the drama of human action. Plato's theory of ideas is the basis both of his ethics and metaphysics. A theory of obligation is ultimately found to be inseparable from a metaphysics of personality. If the chief end of man be discoverable, it cannot be irrelevant to the ultimate meaning of the universe. Comte sought to ignore metaphysics

<sup>1</sup> Philosophy has been called the 'science of sciences.' Vide Ladd's *Introduction to Philosophy*, Chap. I. 'History and Definition of Term Philosophy.'

and limit human thought in this direction. Leslie Stephens in his *Science of Ethics* seeks to leave metaphysical considerations out of sight ; but they are introduced without acknowledgement or inconsistently implied. The 'idea of humanity,' to have any ethical meaning, involves a corresponding order of the universe. Ethics, apart from metaphysical convictions, is a broken chain dragging heavily along the earth, and moral paralysis or confusion must result if the demand for an ultimate reality be denied.

In Christian ethics the philosophical assumptions are necessarily of a theistic kind. The metaphysical postulates are the same as those of Christian theology. They partly arise from the necessities of the case as the problems of philosophy are approached from the side of moral consciousness ; at the same time we are convinced that the results reached in this way are equally necessary to the proper understanding of natural phenomena. 'Phenomena alone, unsupported by any nucleus of the real world, would be but as flapping drapery hanging upon no solid form, but folded round the empty outline of a ghost.'<sup>1</sup>

The existence of God as personal is a preliminary postulate of Christian ethics. On

<sup>1</sup> Martineau, *Types of Ethical Theory*, Vol. I. p. v.

the foundation of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, that concerning which the human mind speculates, Christian teaching asserts.

The nature of God and His relation to mankind in its full discussion belongs to theology. Arguments for the existence of God are usually treated in manuals of theology,<sup>1</sup> but the moral groundwork of that discussion brings our thought at first in touch with philosophical inquiry as to the nature of man as a moral agent. From the time of Hobbes (1588–1679) the attempt has been made to explain the nature of moral obligation on the lines of materialistic well-being and social restraints. This covers many forms of philosophical thought, and in latest development has passed from utilitarianism to evolutionary theories of social well-being.<sup>2</sup>

Philosophically, Christian ethics has allied itself in the first place with intuitionism, of which James Martineau may be referred to as representative, and with idealism, of which T. H. Green's ethical doctrine is an example, though the pantheistic tendency of idealism

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Banks, *Manual of Christian Theology*, Part I. Chap. I.; D'Arcy, *Short Study of Ethics*, Appendix, Part I. Flint's *Theism* discusses the question fully.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Darwin, *Descent of Man*; Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*; Alexander, *Moral Order and Progress*; L. Stephen, *Science of Ethics*; &c.



is repudiated. Still, it is with such theories that the standpoint of Christian ethics is most akin.

This much applies to the position now before us, that the philosophical requirement is the recognition of the supernatural or spiritual element of man's nature. Professor Green, in his *Prolegomena of Ethics*, finds the basis of this recognition in the knowledge of nature.<sup>1</sup> The necessity of recognizing the distinct activity of the thinking subject in relation to the cosmic order of the world is fully discussed, and he also maintains the existence of a spiritual principle in the universe itself determining the phenomena we observe, behind their regular uniformity. The connexion of this question with the freedom of the will and the integrity of the idea of moral obligation will recur, but this will be sufficient indication at this point of the relation of Christian ethics to philosophy or metaphysics.

2. *The relation of Christian ethics to ethics.* By use of the more general term is meant scientific or philosophical ethics not directed by the same guidance of revealed truth as Christian ethics. Martensen contrasts them as *autonomous* (or self-regulated) as opposed to *theonomous* (or God-regulated). He regards Christian ethics

<sup>1</sup> Vide Introduction.



as only relatively *autonomous*, and essentially *theonomous*.

Rationalistic schemes of ethics have abounded from the days of Socrates. Many of these have elements of truth in harmony with Christian ethics. Many of them are antagonistic, and are therefore criticized and combatted by exponents of the Christian teaching. Systems of a naturalistic kind cannot do full justice to the fact of man's moral history; neither systems of hedonism nor utilitarianism which seek to explain the distinctly moral ideas in terms of material well-being; neither the cynical egoism of Hobbes, nor the pantheistic scheme of Spinoza, can be regarded as doing justice to all the facts of the case from a Christian standpoint; and therefore such theories provoke perpetual resistance.

Evolutionary ethics, in like manner, as represented by Herbert Spencer, Leslie Stephen, and Alexander, in the attempt to explain moral obligation as merely the outcome of social development, does not square with Christian ethics. In fact, any attempt to obliterate the distinction between necessity and freedom is in opposition.

At the same time, Christianity does not deny the utility of ethics nor the ethical evolution

of mankind. The method of Christian ethical science is to adopt any elements of truth in thought independent of revelation in full confidence of the ultimate coincidence of faith and reason. It claims rather to include nature as the moral order than to make morals a part of the natural order. At the same time, there must be a jealousy and tenacity in maintaining that which is overlooked in such theories as those referred to.

The goal of philosophical ethical inquiry, on the other hand, must be fairly and completely to do justice to Christian ethics. To ignore the facts of Christian moral consciousness is to be self-condemned, and while Christian ethics endeavours to vindicate itself in the face of other systems of ethics, it presupposes and judges them. The difference tends to disappear in proportion as the philosophy of an age becomes christianized and the Christianity of an age becomes rational and real. No necessary and permanent antagonism can be admitted between reason and faith, and consequently the ethics of reason seeks for fulfilment in the ethics of faith.<sup>1</sup>

3. *Christian ethics and psychology.* The relation between ethics and psychology is of

<sup>1</sup> Newman Smyth, *Christian Ethics*, p. 7: cp. Dorner, *System of Christian Ethics*, § 3.

the closest kind ; so close, in fact, that they have sometimes been confused. No treatment of the subject of moral judgement and right conduct can be accurate without an examination of the psychological basis of thought and volition. The science which deals with the facts and processes of mental life must render its service to ethics and Christian ethics. Dr. Martineau makes psychology the basis of his classification of ethical theories and the touchstone of their worth. He maintains that 'psychological ethics is altogether peculiar to Christendom.'<sup>1</sup> It is justifiable thus far, that no ethics psychologically false or inadequate can permanently maintain its position. At the same time, the two sciences are distinct. 'Ethics must be based on a knowledge of the deepest and most general elements and powers of human nature, but psychology is not concerned with the value of the phenomena it investigates. It has to do with what is, and not with what ought to be. But the phenomena lose none of their value by being understood.'<sup>2</sup>

Just as in discussing the process of acquiring knowledge psychology borders on logic, and epistemology,<sup>3</sup> so in the examination of the

<sup>1</sup> *Types of Ethical Theory*, Vol. I. p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Hoffding, *Psychology*, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Epistemology is the science which treats of the validity of human knowledge.

processes of volition, the meaning of motive and intention, and of the growth of moral sentiments, psychology is auxiliary to ethics. But while submitting to the tests of psychological investigation, ethics reserves the right to interpret and explain the meaning of the phenomena of moral consciousness, and hence psychology has been the battle-ground of conflicting ethical theories. Christian ethics claims exact fidelity to certain elements of moral consciousness—e.g. freedom of the will, and the essence of moral obligation or ‘the categorical imperative,’ personal relation to God.

Further, Christian ethics may claim to provide fresh material for psychological examination, in that the mind which comes under the influence of Christian religion, and the power of the Holy Spirit, reveals and develops capacities and emotions of an ethical kind not otherwise possible. The scientific importance of this side of the subject has only just begun to be realized. The apologetic value has been emphasized from popular or empirical<sup>1</sup> estimate; but the full importance of Christian ethical psychology, as part of a scientific scrutiny of religious phenomena, is too important to be longer

<sup>1</sup> By empirical we mean based upon uninvestigated observation and experience.

ignored. Attempts have already been made in that direction,<sup>1</sup> but especially in the Christian ethical aspect of the study of religion we believe there are elements that will always surpass the limits of mere natural explanation, and have not yet had adequate treatment.

4. *Christian ethics and theology.*<sup>2</sup> Reference has already been made to the historical relation of these two aspects of the systematization of Christian truth, and to their importance.<sup>3</sup> It is necessary, however, to consider this question from a slightly different point of view. While the Christian religion presupposes ethical ideas to which it can appeal and which are of abiding worth, yet as a climax in the ethical development of mankind Christian ethics is based upon Christian theology.

This dependence, yet development, is really part of that essential combination between religion and morality of which theology and Christian ethics are the systematic description. That religion and morality can and have existed separately is indisputable. The religions of paganism are remote from moral life. Morality such as stoicism, and the formal theories of

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Prof. William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*; Dr. Frank Granger, *Soul of a Christian*.

<sup>2</sup> Vide Martensen, §§ 5-13.      <sup>3</sup> Chap. I.

Kant, avoid the religious aspect of conduct. It is true the natural instinct for such completion of our moral needs is revealed in these, but, so far as such morality goes, the necessity of religion is avoided. Christian ethics is essentially religious. Doctrine and duty are interwoven in Christian revelation.

It is only human thought which separates and abstracts one from the other for convenience and advantage in the interests of both. Their ultimate harmony is guaranteed in the conception of God as absolute goodness. Right is not right merely because God wills it (Scotus)<sup>1</sup>; but God wills it because it is right (Aquinas). This does not rob God of His omnipotence, but harmonizes our thought of His omnipotence with His goodness. God could not act in any way contrary to His own nature—‘He cannot deny Himself.’ The apparent limitation is only self-consistency. Neither the nature nor government of God is an anarchic despotism. But the Christian religion claims further to deal with the ethical needs of mankind, and in Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Son of God and Moral Ideal of Man the necessities of man’s actual condition are met.

<sup>1</sup> The mediaeval controversy between followers of Dun Scotus and Thomas Aquinas.

Whereas, therefore, the appeal of Christianity implies the capacity to appreciate moral excellence, on the other hand, if it were not possible for those capacities to be developed and directed, the appeal would have no purpose; which is distinctly what is asserted. It is claimed for Christianity that it provides the highest and most complete method of such development and direction.

Theology considers the revelation in which this combination is seen upon the side of truth concerning God and His relation to man. Christian ethics considers the same revelation from the side of the duty of man. This statement does not do complete justice to the complications of the case, but it is substantially how they are best distinguished. The complication may be further stated thus.

All doctrine is subject to the scrutiny of Christian moral consciousness, which thus provides a safeguard against any teaching which clearly contravenes the fundamental moral principles of Christian revelation. It was certainly moral feeling which was the secret of the Reformation and the source of antagonism to transubstantiation and doctrine of reprobation.<sup>1</sup> But even such criticism of theology

<sup>1</sup> Lecky, *History of European Morals*, Vol. I. p. 96.



must justify itself by reference to the same standard of truth. Further, for the enlargement of the scope of ethical teaching and its finer specific principles, Christian ethics is indebted to theology. The basis and superstructure are alike affected by theological considerations.

It is this which peculiarly marks off Christian ethics from ethics. By the necessity of man's moral nature religious inferences arise out of their mere natural consideration. But though they may be partially acknowledged, yet the full force of those inferences has been disregarded by merely ethical writers. Thus, for instance, Kant, 'as he advanced in his speculation, was tempted to make continual attempts to bridge over the chasm between man and man, and between nature and man; and in the same spirit he could not but endeavour also to draw down God into relation with His creatures, and to conceive Him as a principle working in them as well as upon them. The steps which he takes in this direction, however, are never other than tentative and cautious; and he always seems, so to speak, to keep one foot on what to him is the solid rock of the independent moral personality of man, and to be ready to draw back the other whenever the sand



shrinks beneath it.’<sup>1</sup> What rational inquiry infers, yet fears, Christian ethics frankly accepts. What ethics may regard as necessarily complementary, Christian ethics considers in closest association.

The spiritual and inward meaning of our moral nature is thus emphasized, a unity which reason seeks is defined more clearly, and the moral needs of human nature recognized and satisfied.

Tho’ truths in manhood darkly join,  
Deep seated in our mystic frame  
We yield all blessing to the name  
Of Him that made them current coin.<sup>2</sup>

On the common basis of what is morally constant<sup>3</sup> in human nature, viz. the authority of the right, all the light of truth in its interpretation is focussed in Christ as the Sun of Righteousness. He illuminates the highest peaks of man’s thought of good (Phil. iv. 8-9).

Again, it is sometimes said that theology provides ‘sanctions’ for ethics. That is to say, that it considers encouragement and motives for good conduct, and penalties for evil conduct, of a distinct kind. Future rewards and punishments have doubtless played a powerful part in the

<sup>1</sup> Edward Caird, *Critical Philosophy of Kant*, II. p. 564.

<sup>2</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, xxxvi.

<sup>3</sup> Newman Smyth, p. 33.

moral education of the human race. But it may be claimed that this is by no means a complete nor adequate description of the Christian motive, nor the highest phase of its ethical teaching. A so-called jural system may be framed, which may yet depend upon a more comprehensive and vitally progressive principle for its interpretation.

Religion, again, has been described as 'morality touched by emotion.'<sup>1</sup> But all conduct is touched by emotion. The emotion of any conduct may not be specifically religious. Even so-called religious acts may be wrought apart from religious emotion. But in so far as acts are wrought with a recognition of religious significance, their ethical character is thereby affected; and Christian teaching affects the emotions most powerfully.

The ideal of Christian ethics is associated with historic facts. Their metaphysical meaning theology describes. Their moral significance ethics describes. Their combined application to the individual experience is the religious life of the Christian, in all its intellectual, emotional, and volitional compass.

When we speak of the Christian religion as well as the Christian faith we make no real

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Arnold.

distinction ; for though the latter term belongs rather to the system of what is believed, and the former to the worship and practice resulting, both alike combine in the life of the Christian.

‘The perpetual remembrance of the supremacy of ethics tends to save theological study from its hardness and barrenness. It limits the range of that part of it which is speculative, and sheds a peculiar grace on all the residue. But it must not be forgotten that, while Christian ethics is the consummation of theological science, the underlying science upon which it rests is essential to its integrity. It degenerates, unless this is always remembered, into a mere subjective or sentimental reflection. The moral system which is not based on a sure substratum of truth is a construction of broken fragments without an architect or plan.’<sup>1</sup>

The absence of religion has invariably meant ethical decay as the ultimate if not immediate issue, and moral degeneracy can never help forward religion.

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Pope, *Compendium of Theology*, Vol. III. pp. 1-2.

## CHAPTER III

### MAN AS A MORAL AGENT<sup>1</sup>

AS has already been stated, the problem of ethics is deeply rooted in our thoughts concerning the meaning of the universe. It goes illimitably beyond the individual life. But nevertheless, the problem of ethics arises in the personal consciousness of the individual. Except for its intimate and vital significance in our own mental experience, strictly speaking, there had never been any problem of ethics. As a matter of fact, there are certain elements of our consciousness which by their specific character challenge the inquiry from which ethics proceeds. There is a considerable group of words which in the first instance provoke our

<sup>1</sup> Illingworth, *Personality, Human and Divine*, Lect. I. & II.; Green, *Prolegomena of Ethics*, Book I. Chap. I. & II.; D'Arcy, *A Short Study of Ethics*, Part I. Chap. I. & III.; Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, §§ 21-7; Dorner, *System of Christian Ethics*, Part I. Div. I. Sec. I.

estimate of their value as they are presented with intelligible meaning in common use—e.g. good, bad, right, wrong, ought, duty, merit, and such-like. These words drive us back upon ourselves. Their force is first felt within before we seek some external justification of their power over us, or their universal application to other lives, and before we endeavour to harmonize their meaning with a theory of the universe.

It is therefore natural and necessary first of all to consider what is our estimate of man as a moral agent, what are the essential features of human nature which form the basis of ethical theory.

It is clear this will by no means exhaust the teaching of Christian ethics with regard to man's moral nature. The method of its developments will require our attention, but we have now to deal with the preliminary moral qualifications of mankind, the philosophical basis which is in harmony with Christian teaching, and the ground of rejection of that which would impair the integrity or validity of those moral qualifications.

## I. CONDUCT (DESIRE, WILL, AND MOTIVE)

The judgement we pass on conduct, whether

of others or our own, has reference primarily to actions.

By the use of the word 'conduct' we declare a contrast between that which may be termed action in the most general use of the word, and that action which may be regarded as part of conduct. We speak of the action of certain chemicals, the action of a machine, and also of the organs of the human body. All these, however, fall short of that action which we refer to as conduct. By this distinction the dual nature of man is emphasized. Partly we are under the reign of physical law. We say we cannot help certain actions. So long as we live the heart must beat, and the automatic processes of nature take place. These are shared with other animals, and even with plants. Reflex and instinctive movements are merely the discharge of the nervous mechanism responding to certain external stimulation. But it would be impossible to live as human beings without the exercise of will, whatever men's theories of will may be, and all these forms of action described fall short of that to which we refer as conduct, inasmuch as they are involuntary. We mean by conduct voluntary acts linked together by a purpose of which we are conscious. Purpose is the essential element

of rational action, and it is only with such we have to do.

Immediately we ask what this element of purpose means we enter upon an analysis of conduct and the meaning of desire and will, and many psychological questions of utmost importance.

The development of volition can be described as follows :

We have certain *wants* in common with animals. A *want* is a blind tendency as the outcome of our growth as sentient beings. When wants are recognized as habitual tendencies they are termed *appetites*. As experience grows the satisfaction of appetitive craving is associated with images of repeated movements and their results, and a stock of such images is accumulated.

*Impulses* are isolated promptings to action in this or that particular direction ; but voluntary action involves the activity of the self-conscious subject.

As Dr. James Ward has shown,<sup>1</sup> ' However much assailed or disowned, the conception of a mind or conscious subject is to be found implicitly or explicitly in all psychological

<sup>1</sup> Art. " Psychology," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 20, p. 39.

writers whatever—not more in Berkeley, who accepts it as a fact, than in Hume, who accepts it as a fiction.’

The views of mere associationists are quite discredited by the evasions or omissions of this particular element.<sup>1</sup> Without the activity of the ego, or subject, by which sensations are related to itself and each other, and thus transformed into experience, there would be no continuity or coherence of reality for us, and knowledge would be impossible. Without the recognition of this same activity of the subject it is impossible to explain conduct. Man is not merely the centre for the play of certain forces which produce a result and which can be calculated, but a personal self which is the unifying principle of knowledge and which is equally necessary to explain every act of will and the continuity of conduct.

*Desire* is marked by the consciousness of a want or appetite and the object proper to its gratification. Just where, by the direction of attention in the perception of objects, knowledge involves self-realization, and the apprehension of the world in contrast to self, there begins the same activity which gives the peculiar

<sup>1</sup> Martineau, *Study of Religion*, Part III. Chap. II., criticizes Bain and Mill, as also do all theistic moralists,



feature to human volition. Desire is the identifying of self with the object as good; will is the practical aspect of that same identification in making the idea of personal good real. On the emotional side there is an anticipation, an ideal sip of the pleasure, and pain is the suppression of the tendency to realize it; but it is the identification of the self with the realization of the desire, and the active striving towards an end, or aversion from an end as painful, which is prominent in human volition.<sup>1</sup>

We may, then, advance a step farther and distinguish what we mean by motive.

A *motive* is a desire transformed into a practical incentive to action.

*Wishes* are similar promptings without the same active element. They are contemplative,<sup>2</sup> and associated with the thought that the attainment is not possible.<sup>3</sup>

They are not therefore unimportant. The saying, 'Opportunity makes the thief,' is an illustration of their potential good or evil, but motive as a desire transformed to definite purpose is marked by these contrasts as a complete stage in the development of volition.

<sup>1</sup> Vide Sully, *The Human Mind*, Vol. II. p. 196 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Hoffding, *Outlines of Psychology*, p. 326.

<sup>3</sup> James, *Principles of Psychology*, p. 486.

Again, *intention* refers to subsidiary events in the accomplishment of a purpose. There are intermediate steps by which an end may be achieved. They may be regretted, and if it were possible would be avoided, but as a means to the end desired they are deliberately anticipated. Thus the infliction of unavoidable pain upon a child in a surgical operation or moral discipline, or the oppositions and conflict attendant on schemes of social reform, are alike the intention, so far as foreseen, of those who cause them, but their end is the motive which really dominates their actions. It is only actions which are performed with conscious intention or desire that are comprised by conduct.

## II. CHARACTER (DISPOSITION AND HEREDITY)

So far a description has been given of the development of volition. But conduct is further complicated by the elements of deliberation and disposition, and this latter is associated with the question of the influence of heredity. Deliberation is the inward condition of suspense in face of alternative possibilities of action. Disposition is the factor of this process, arising from within, as the outcome of bodily and mental constitution.

We have seen that it is only in the identification of a particular desire with the individual subject that volition consists, and that it is this identification which gives the desire its force in the resulting action. That which in desire is ideal becomes actual through the exercise of will. But this activity of the subject is not *merely* self-determination. In a considerable measure it is self-expression.<sup>1</sup>

The relation of mind and body is of the closest kind. Those who favour material explanations of mental processes are able to point to the cerebral con-committant of thought and feeling.<sup>2</sup> But apart from the uncertainties of localizations of brain functions there have come to prominence phenomena of an opposite kind from that of the influence of body upon mind. The brain is susceptible to non-physical control in hypnotism and kindred phenomena, which causes the balance to swing to the side of the theory of spiritual existence apart from material causes. Besides which, there is a group of facts which, while illustrating the limitations of the mind by its organism, show how it may contend

<sup>1</sup> Cp. D'Arcy, *Short Study of Ethics*, Book II. Chap. I.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. Maudsley, *Body and Mind*; W. James, *Principles of Psychology*, Vol. I. Chap. II.

against physical defects, and text-books of psychology abound in illustrations of the achievements of the blind, and of deaf mutes.<sup>1</sup>

Further, it must be remembered that, so far from ignoring the connexion between the physical and spiritual, much of the New Testament teaching would be without explanation except as based upon a profound intimation and recognition of the close dependence. The sacraments are the expression of this inseparable bond upon the higher side. But the soul fashions the body, not the body the soul.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, the fact that every man is born into the world with an organism in which lie latent unknown resultant tendencies from the experience of the race, and from the more immediate ancestry of the individual, is beyond dispute. The position in regard to heredity is still open to inquiry.

The intricacies and capricious manifestations of these heredity traits are beyond any prophecy

<sup>1</sup> Vide *The Story of my Life*, Helen Keller, blind and deaf (Hodder & Stoughton, 1903). Cp. Laura Bridgman, blind and deaf mute; Sanderson, blind optician, Martensen, §§ 24-5.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. St. John's Gospel, vi. 51, iv. 34.

For of the soule the bodie forme doth take,  
For soul is forme and doth the bodie make.

EDMUND SPENSER.

of what will be the disposition of any one person. Attempts to account for genius are sometimes, based on the slightest grounds. But though there is no pattern reproduced again and again, there is a type of race, and family, persistent according to a certain uniformity of conditions and experience.

There are startling contradictions of any hasty generalizations in this matter, but that it is one of the factors of human history and biography is undeniable.<sup>1</sup>

Conduct is, after all, then, the reaction of character upon circumstances, as well as the building up of character. In the first instance hereditary tendencies or predisposition gives a certain bent to respond to circumstances in a particular manner. This forms as it were a working capital, and conduct is the trading whereby its poverty or wealth of moral goodness may be increased.

It is possible to resist inclination on rational consideration, and it is just in such deliberation and control that responsibility consists. Habit, that great 'fly-wheel of society,'<sup>2</sup> tends by repetition to reduce conscious and deliberate action to the level of the instinctive or reflex

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Dorner, *Ethics*, 'Genesis of Individuality,' § 14.

<sup>2</sup> W. James, *Principles of Psychology*, chapter on 'Habit.'

action. It is in this way that conduct becomes significant not only of the moral worth of the particular action, but of the character of which it is the outcome and expression. That individuality is the incomprehensible problem of all mechanical theories of ethics. It is illustrated in the varying modifications and formations exhibited in face and bearing.<sup>1</sup> By its subtle relation to conduct we are forced to explain the fact on the assumption of personality, and character becomes the object of the ethical judgement.

The action interpreted by the character, and as providing a clue to the moulding of character, becomes of considerably greater importance than the isolated action of the moment. Mere good intentions are not the object of ethical judgement, nor does disposition condone a man's deeds ; but character is that complex growth from conduct that undergoes continual modification according as a man's actions develop or restrain the tendencies existing primarily in his disposition.

Character, as the word signifies in its etymology, is the *mark* upon the man. The mind is not comparable to a plain surface (or *tabula*

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Lavater, and physiognomy as discussed by Martensen, § 23.

*rasa*); but there are already impressions of varying intensity, or latent capacity for thought and action, which may be suppressed or deepened. It is only by such suppression or emphasis that individual character is created, and conduct, as it represents the satisfaction of self, is both the revelation of character and the making of character as well.

Thus, character is more than disposition ; it is just the extra of the self-conscious subject once again in relation to the dispositions. Just as, viewing the single act of conduct, the essential feature of ethical value is the self-conscious direction of activity in regard to external circumstances, so the same extra must be remembered when we include the inward disposition among the circumstances of conduct. Character is the aggregate result of such individual actions persisting as a force in subsequent actions.

### III. THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL

Such being a psychological analysis of what we regard as action within the range of ethical judgement, it still remains to vindicate the moral responsibility implied, and this exact significance of will. There is frequently an ambiguity in the use of the word 'desire.' It is



frequently used as though they were conflicting tendencies to action, considered apart for their relation to the person acting, whereas it has been described as not accurately desire until it has become identified with self as a good to be attained.

‘It must be admitted that an act of will is never *mere* desire, never a desire which has been in conflict with other co-ordinate desires, and has come out the strongest, if in speaking of such desire we suppose abstraction to be made of the action of a self-determining self upon and within it. But in this there lies no difference between will and any other principle of moral or human or imputable, as distinct from merely animal, action, for merely desire of that kind, to which will can properly be opposed, never amounts to such a principle. The true distinction lies between passions as influences affecting a man—among which we may include mere desires if we please—and the man as desiring, or putting himself forth in desire for the realization of some object present to him in idea, which is the same thing as willing.’<sup>1</sup>

The question of the *freedom of the will* is involved in this distinction. It is not merely the ethical necessity which demands the

<sup>1</sup> Green, *Prolegomena*, § 147, p. 152.



freedom of the will, but the interpretation of what will means which requires it. The command of morality carries with it the assumption of possible obedience or disobedience, and would be unmeaning without it. Nevertheless, the controversy has come down from the centuries, and has assumed the form of attempts to reconcile this first ethical demand and the observed uniformity of nature. Often the conception of will as something distinct from the self has invaded the argument concerning freedom; whereas it can only be described as the unique feature of personality and self-activity. The activity of the knowing and willing subject is just that self-determination apart from which no knowledge or conduct can be. Such activity is not so to speak *in vacuo*—that is, apart from the material conditions of life; but no amount of physical and physiological antecedents become knowledge or volition without that activity of the personal spirit. The will is thus identified with self. ‘If we are told that the ego or self is an abstraction from the facts of our inner experience—something which we accustom ourselves to suppose as a basis or substratum for these, but which exists only logically, not really—it is a fair rejoinder that these so-called facts, our particular

feelings, desires, and thoughts, are abstractions if considered otherwise than as united in the character of an agent who is an object to himself.’<sup>1</sup> Determinism, which considers that volition is determined by the strongest motive, overlooks the true character of the freedom claimed. It is not unmotivated willing; but it is a true understanding of what is inherent in the influence of motive and the exercise of will.

The ethical necessity of this view must also be fully realized. Materialistic and utilitarian theories endeavour to explain away the consciousness of freedom as illusion; yet this sense of freedom is the realization of the function of consciousness in its most complex and impressive manifestation. ‘If the freedom of the will in every sense be given up and necessity proved victorious the ethical ought is left without meaning, and morality becomes a polite fiction.’<sup>2</sup>

Psychology as a science naturally seeks a deterministic explanation of our experience; but the power of attention in which lies the secret consciousness of self-direction refuses to disappear as a simple process of ‘radiation of our innermost being’ (Hoffding). It requires

<sup>1</sup> Green, *Prolegomena*, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> D’Arcy, *Short Study of Ethics*, p. 22.

the recognition of the self or ego apart from the so-called self of accumulated tendencies. So Kant felt in face of the necessities of moral conduct. The unconditional command of morality carries with it the assumption that it can be obeyed.

Professor James maintains that the question is insoluble on strictly psychologic grounds. 'The grounds are ethical, metaphysical. The order of uniform causation which science has use for may be enveloped in a wider order on which she has no claims at all. And thus our morality and our religion depend upon the effort we can make. Will you or won't you have it so? is the most probing question we are ever asked. We answer by consents or non-consents and not by words. What wonder that these dumb responses should seem our deepest organs of communication with the nature of things and the measure of our worth as man?'<sup>1</sup>

In face of some terrible murder we must either accept it as a part of the inevitable order of the world, which means pessimism; or attempt to lessen the absolute validity of goodness. 'When murders and treacheries cease to be sins regrets are theoretic absurdities

<sup>1</sup> *Principles of Psychology*, p. 569 ff.

and errors. Regret cannot be good without treachery and murder being bad.’<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, merely subjective interpretation of goodness leads to all sorts of licence. It transforms life from a tragic reality into an insincere melodramatic exhibition as foul or as tawdry as any man’s diseased curiosity pleases to carry it out.

Even after spending much ingenuity against his own apprehension of the metaphysical basis of free will, Mr. W. H. Mallock concludes : ‘ We have only to eliminate freedom from our conceptions of human nature, and we shall find that we have eliminated the essence of all moral and all social civilizations. Why should a child be devoted to even the fondest mother, if it knew that its mother could no more help loving it than the sun on a fine day could help shining in at the window ? ’<sup>2</sup> By no scheming can these sacred instincts of moral life be preserved if rigid determinism be adhered to.

Further, it will also be clear that the relative conception of responsibility leads to the necessity of a Personal God, to whom the responsibility is due, and the further needs of spiritual life

<sup>1</sup> W. James. *The Will to Believe* (Dilemma of Determinism).

<sup>2</sup> *Religion as a Credible Doctrine*, p. 248.

enforce the initial demand of ethics, as well as explain it. This aspect of the subject is just where no system of philosophy has yet availed to meet the needs of the case. Whether it be agnostic materialism or pantheistic idealism, all schemes of monistic philosophy lead to nothing but a conception of God as immanent force or spirit. The idea of transcendent personality which the moral consciousness of mankind demands cannot at present be met in that direction. It is met however, by Christian revelation.

‘The Father of Spirits’ is concerned in the life of men, and that is essential to man’s sense of free will. We are not here referring to the moral character of God—that in itself demands notice; but in the conception of a Personal Being we shall see we have the only adequate counterpart to the individual freedom of man as a moral agent.

It may be well also to notice that there is a Christian recognition of determination. Both in the sovereignty of God and in the doctrine of divine grace we have the theological and spiritual counterpart to uniformity in the processes of nature. However difficult and apparently insoluble the problem of their reconciliation with personal liberty or causation may seem,

we cannot surrender free will in favour of any theory that does not meet the needs of the case with regard to man as a moral agent. The only intelligible interpretation of nature must be by assuming personality behind all its countless forms and changes. The problem in metaphysics marks the limitations of the human mind in its incapacity to arrive at unity or philosophic monism. In the realm of theology this much is achieved, that so far from our conception of omnipotence and omniscience destroying the possibility of creative and contingent liberty, it involves such possibility. In moral consciousness and the fundamental conceptions of ethics, free will is impregnably entrenched.

#### IV. THE CHRISTIAN ESTIMATE OF MAN AS A MORAL AGENT

We shall find the Christian estimate of man as a moral agent in harmony with the foregoing analysis of the nature of moral action.

The Bible contains not only the progressive revelation of God to man which finds its climax in the fullness of time in Christ Jesus ; but it also contains the account of the progressive development of man as able to respond stage by stage to the fuller revelations and higher

appeal of the claims of God. 'When the fulness of the time came God sent forth His son born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons' (Gal. iv. 4).

Hence it was that that which was prominent at one stage passes into the background at another. In the Old Testament *the primitive importance of action itself in its external result is that which is first noticeable.*

The story of the Garden of Eden represents the first command in plain simplicity as the prohibition of a single deed. The discipline of the chosen nation of Israel was most marked in its external method. The Ten Commandments, are distinctly negative. They are restrictions upon outward act, restraints upon conduct. The whole ceremonial of Judaism was external, and included much that was on a level with regulations of a local sanitary authority. Clearly it is the outward act, the deed, that is right or wrong. *Still, the value of motive as the true test of conduct, and character as the true index of moral worth, gradually came to be apprehended.* This shines through the outward record of events in biography and history of the Old Testament in a way which may even seem confusing. Those dispositions which appear



amiable and attractive are sometimes less regarded than others whose deeper ethical value is not so immediately perceived. The more fruitful and powerful virtue of faith comes to the front in biography and national life as the link in a variety of circumstances between a living soul and living God. There is an ethical importance attached to faith from Abraham to Paul.<sup>1</sup> Its peculiar ethical value cannot just here be fully expressed; but the emphasis put upon it in the Old Testament is a foreshadowing of its more complete demonstration in the New Testament, and illustrates the underlying harmony between the two in their ethical estimate of man. The outward acts and negative restraints were not all that was taken account of even in times when rudimentary discipline made the accent of moral teaching to fall upon these rather than inward motive. Gradually, under the influence of psalmists and prophets, a perception of the inward value of conduct was created.

*But in the teaching of Christ there is no ambiguity as to the inwardness of moral life. God judges the actions by the heart, while men judge the heart by the actions. They*

<sup>1</sup> Cp. *Lux Mundi*, Chap. I.



cannot really be dissevered, for there is a subtle correspondence. But the inward motive and character are the basis of God's judgement; whereas judgement by the more external act can never be a firm foundation of moral worth.

To the motive, the endeavour, the heart's self,  
His quick sense looks; He calls and crowns aright  
The soul of the purpose ere 'tis shaped an act.<sup>1</sup>

Hence the whole conflict of Christ's earthly life was against the Phariseeism which had encrusted the moral life of the Jews. The inwardness which had grown up as witnessed by psalmist and prophet was, so to speak, suffocated under the legal minutiae of punctilious externalism. Tithes, ablutions, ceremonies, almsgiving were observed; while the essential qualities of goodness were absent (Matt. xxiii. 13-36). Hence Christ declared, 'Unless your righteousness exceed the righteousness of scribes and Pharisees ye cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven' (Matt. v. 20.). The most scathing of His denunciations were against the inward moral corruptions, self-seeking and self-complacency, of external respectability, the 'whited sepulchres' of His times (cp. Luke xi. 39-52;

<sup>1</sup> Browning's *Luria*.

Mark vii. 6-13 ; xii. 38-40). Both in commendation and condemnation this method was the same. 'She hath done what she could' is capable of application to acts of wrong as well as acts of good, though the object of wrong-doing be but a child (Mark ix. 37-42); though the service of good be never so small (cp. Matt. xii. 3-47 ; Mark xii. 41 ff.).<sup>1</sup> The Sermon on the Mount is mainly taken up with the searching applications of the decalogue and customs of religion to the inward desire of the heart.

*Further, the nature of Christ's own example can only be understood by such inward interpretation.* It is His motive and character that are put in the forefront. The beauty of that life can only be seen by the recognition of who He was, and why He did as He did. It is that which gives moral grandeur to His actions. In the Wedgwood pottery in Etruria there is an exquisite design by Flaxman for which two hundred guineas has been refused. It is but a few lines upon paper ; but the perfectness of design makes it of worth. It is thus that the lofty designs of Christ are the explanation of His most morally beautiful actions. It sometimes is brought to our notice in startling fashion.

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Wendt, *Teaching of Jesus*, Chap. IV. Sec. A.

For example, in the washing of the disciples' feet, the narrative is linked with the sublimest estimate possible of Christ's mission and nature (see St. John xiii. 3-5); so that no mere imitation of the acts of Christ can arrive at the meaning of His example. The notion is tainted with external limitations at once. It is from within outward that it works. Any external act is special, transient, and unique, the response of an inward character and condition to the outward circumstances of the moment. It is the inward disposition which is all important.

Thus the power of His example is permanent and capable of infinite variation of partial expression.<sup>1</sup> Here, too, is the secret of the universal scope of the Christian teaching. While we claim that here in its inwardness is to be sought its radical harmony with the Old Testament, yet it passes far beyond all local and limited application of which Judaism is an illustration. The partial and preparatory discipline of the selected race of Abraham breaks down as a standard for all time and for all people; but the emphasis placed by Christ on motive and the inwardness which He proclaimed enthrones morality in the citadel

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Martineau, *Study of Religion*, Vol. II. p. 32,

of life. 'The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord' (Prov. xx. 27), and 'to keep the heart with all diligence' (Prov. iv. 23), is the secret strife of goodness.

The conflict of this estimate of man as a moral agent has again and again been repeated, whether against revived ceremonialism or theological antinomianism. *Inwardness is the very essence of Christian ethics*—the inwardness not separate from outward acts such as in gnostic libertinism, nor an impossible condition of wisdom such as is found in pagan moralists, but an inward estimate that reckons the actual conditions of the heart and deals with the possibilities of the springs of action.<sup>1</sup> External restrictions are for the legal codes of nations. Their limits in the direction of human affairs are acknowledged. They may prevent crime and preserve order; but there can be no guarantee of inward conformity. 'The Christian moral reformation may be summed up in this, humanity changed from a restraint to a motive.'<sup>2</sup> And in this is revealed the supremacy of the Christian ethical method, its true apprehension of the moral nature of man.

Persons must act by reason of free choice

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Sidgwick, *History of Ethics*, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> *Ecce Homo*.

if the act is to be the expression and also the moulding of the character. Not even in early stages of childhood can unreasoning obedience long avail, much less in the fuller development of mind and soul. It is therefore at the creation and development of character that Christian ethical teaching aims, and no mere precepts can be descriptive of its subtle method of moral elevation.

*In the emphasis laid upon temptation we have another illustration of the Christian estimate of man's moral nature.* From the story of the first transgression right on to the triumph of Christ over evil in the wilderness, the use of this instrument for the discipline of human nature implies the endowment with a solemn capacity of self-direction. That conflict has other aspects; but this is most impressively emphasized that within, within the individual as qualified for the fight, takes place the testing of a free spirit. Whether it is in the unmitigated personal condemnation of the fifty-first Psalm, or in the reasoned appeal of the Epistle of James (chap. i.), or in the encouraging exhortations of St. Paul (Rom. vi.-vii. ; 1 Cor. x. 13), the same assumption of freedom is to be found. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is true to the genius of Christianity in its discernment of this capacity of

choice as the distinctive endowment of the race.

I formed them free, and free they must remain  
Till they enthrall themselves ; I else must change  
Their nature and revoke the high decree,  
Unchangeable, eternal, which ordained  
Their freedom.

To avoid the occasions of temptation where possible (Matt. xxvi. 41) ; to resist evil in its subtle and manifold form (James iv. 7) ; to fight against the repeated attack ; to keep a quick discernment of its approach : these are all parts of Christian duty which reiterate again and again that the foundation of life's moral discipline is in our capacity for the voluntary alliance of our inmost nature on the side of God against the devil.

## CHAPTER IV

### *THE OBJECTIVE CONDITIONS OF ETHICAL LIFE*<sup>1</sup>

WE have reviewed the process whereby we are led to the acceptance of that estimate of man as a moral agent, and the method of judging his conduct, which are fundamental to Christian ethics. We must now consider the external or objective conditions of our ethical life.

It is in the objective relations of life that experience consists. We have seen the inalienable capacity with which the ego, or thinking subject, must be credited in order to explain the peculiar characteristics of our moral consciousness. Now we pass to the external factors of the problem, and must examine how the ethical view of life affects, and is affected by, our interpretation of these. Ethics can never

<sup>1</sup> Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, Book I. Chap. I. II.; D'Arcy, *Short Study of Ethics*, Chap. II. IV. V.; James Martineau, *Study of Religion*, Book I. II.; Illingworth, *Personality*, Lect. I. III. IV.; Dorner, *Christian Ethics*, §§ 6-8.

be a purely individual theory unrestricted from all kinds of self-chosen principles. No man is a law unto himself in the sense of being able to alter the bases of conduct. Our attempt to frame a science of Christian ethics means that we seek to build upon the necessary constitution of human nature, and according to the conditions of conduct prevailing everywhere.

The objective conditions of ethical life are :

- I. Our relation to material things, or nature.
- II. Our relation to other persons, or society.
- III. Our relation to a personal god.

We shall see that the last in order of investigation is first in pre-eminent necessity.

## I. NATURE

It is no arbitrary choice whether we shall endeavour to reduce morals to harmony with the mechanical order of nature, or whether we elevate our estimate of the natural order as having a moral end. *The supremacy and inclusiveness of the moral order is:*

1. *In strict harmony with the analysis of knowledge and conduct in the individual.*
2. *Essential to the integrity of our moral ideas.*
3. *Essential to the complete and thorough interpretation of nature itself.*



1. Just as we find spirit to be the unifying principle of the component parts of experience, the inner and the outer world, so such a principle of unity must exist in nature. We must not suppose that the cosmos, or order of nature, which depends for its existence as known by the individual upon the activity of the subject, is limited to such knowledge. The existence of a mighty universe containing myriads of things not so known, and those which are as well, must be granted. The denial of this would be to produce a state of mere subjective idealism, or solipsism as it is called. Man is the measure of knowledge, but that is not the limit of existence. The consequence of such limitation would only end in absurdity. The principle *esse est percipi* must not so be interpreted.<sup>1</sup> It is a theory of knowledge, not of existence. We are not thereby forced to an agnostic view of nature as a whole. We are not shut up to such an abrupt termination of our intellectual powers just where we need them most. That part of nature which each knows is so known by mind or spirit. Only by such personal identity do we know. Nature therefore must be conditioned by the same unity,

<sup>1</sup> Berkeley, vide Ueberweg, *History of Philosophy*, II. 88, note, or *Encyclopædia Britannica*, II. p. 591.

and exist as constituted by spirit. Intelligibility requires intelligence behind it, and whatever else the directing spirit of nature may be, we are convinced it must be such as we are in personality. Instead of regarding this as a climax of our idea of deity, it is the initial demand concerning nature. Nature, it is true, appears in opposition to the self-determination prevailing in morals by reason of its uniformity and consequent determinism; but while it is determined from without the question comes, 'What determines the whole?' There must be some self-determination in nature. In fact, it is prior to the very idea of necessity. We must believe in this unifying principle equivalent to that which unites the elements of our own experience. No investigation into the processes of nature can dispense with this: Though force and matter be the ultimate factors of the processes; though the atom be endowed 'with promise and potency of all forms of life,' or nebular dust with capacities of an evolved universe; though we track the evolution from step to step: the How? and Why? of all the innumerable complications persist in their appeal. Biology cannot exhaust the mystery of *life*. To discern the ingenious mutual dependence of parts of creation does not spell out all that

*order* connotes. The flying 'cropful bird' is ministering to the vegetation of continents. The drifting icebergs of the polar seas, as well as the bee in the summer grass, are doing their unconscious part in the grand scheme of the world.

But what is the scheme, and what man's part in the drama, is a problem unsolved by scrutiny into the modes and processes of material things. All the knowledge of the processes of the manufacture of ink and paper, and printing, is insufficient to explain the arrangement of letters and words upon a page. Physical law requires for its complement and explanation a theory inclusive of facts of moral life.<sup>1</sup>

2. Whatever be the difficulty of so interpreting nature as to harmonize its facts with moral ideas which we accept, the possibility of some harmony cannot be relinquished. Our programme must include the correlation of man as a moral agent with the material and natural conditions of his life.

*The order of nature of which we ourselves form part must be ethicized.* One aspect of this great contention is, man's moral life is in closest contact with material things. How large a part they play in the affairs of life we know. We have wants and inclinations which

<sup>1</sup> Vide William Arthur, *Physical and Moral Law*.

depend mainly for their supply or gratification on these material conditions. A man wants food for his body, a coat on his back, a roof over his head, and many other necessities and comforts of life. But the problem is this: what appetites or inclinations shall he restrain? and why? and how and when shall he gratify those which are legitimate? Objects of pleasure, possessions, the limitations of bodily life, form the occasions of temptation and opportunities of goodness. Our bodies, money, houses, land, and lesser things are the instruments of conduct. It is the deliberate response to the external circumstances that marks rational beings, and we cannot believe these two elements of life, the inner and outer world, are in irrational collision.

In regard to material things, there are two false attitudes which fail to reconcile this duality in human experience :

(i) Libertinism.

(ii) Asceticism.

(i) Life according to nature, as interpreted by Stoics, was an outcome of their pantheistic theory. It included the exercise of reason in its highest sense, and has been the basis of reform in political life as maintaining an ideal of individual rights. Life according to nature, in which submission to reason is maintained because

‘to preside and govern from the very constitution belongs to it,’ was preached by Butler; but life according to nature, as illustrated in the revolutionary morals of Rousseau, can only mean the surrender of morality to the lower instincts of animalism, or libertinism. In its undisguised and unmitigated forms it needs no refutation.

(ii) On the other hand, life above or beyond nature, so far as illustrated in the cynicism of Diogenes and mediaeval asceticism, is an attempt to avoid the material relations, and starve out the natural inclinations; and so human life becomes unhuman, and its character is destroyed by removing it out of the arena of its moral strife. It escapes from the battle by running away.

It must be confessed asceticism of this kind has at times prevailed in parts of Christendom. The gulf between the natural and supernatural was widened in the middle ages, and during that period growth of character was fettered and the tendency proved retrograde. It is not necessary to describe the gruesome unnaturalness of hermits’ habits. We are not committed to perpetuate or defend such errors; they are inconsistent with the true genius of Christianity.

Neither is there need to elaborate the practical bearing of Old Testament teaching. The recluse is unknown. The rudimentary and disciplinary

character of the Mosaic economy obscures rather than over-estimates the inward state. All its ablutions, purifications, and ceremonial are witness to an optimistic view of the material side of life. Matter is not necessarily evil. No gnostic or theosophic speculations hindered the usefulness and simplicity of the regulations. The tendency of pharisaic externalism, Essenism, and mystic asceticism are far removed from the sane symbolism and plain injunction of Jewish law.

It cannot be alleged that Christ taught any disruption between the inner and outer life. That antagonism there is, we know ; but 'the Son of Man came eating and drinking' (Matt. xi. 19). He prayed for His followers, not that they should be taken out of the world, but that they should be kept from the evil (John xvii. 15). Not that which goeth into a man necessarily defileth (Matt. xv. 11). Yet whether men eat or drink it must be to the glory of God (1 Cor. x. 31). The mere outward act of material benefit is not intrinsically worthy in the doer (1 Cor. xiii. 3). Yet a life that fails in the material ministries of benevolence is radically false (Luke x. 33 ; Matt. xxv. 42 ; Jas. i. 27). The virtue of the New Testament is no abstraction, but the heroism and philanthropy

of living men. Its inwardness is not divorced from actual events and material things. It is through them it finds its expression.

How the antagonism arises between natural inclination and moral obligation, how to reconcile or explain 'the good' and 'the right,' belongs to another part of the subject; but He who revealed the perfect life did so by no abrogation of the legitimate claims of natural life. His end was their sanctification, the elevation yet subordination to higher uses than in themselves they are capable of suggesting. It was thus St. Paul conceived the aim of Christian development of character, when he wrote, 'May your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thess. iv. 23 : cp. 1 Cor. vi.).

So, then, it is neither by neglecting nor confounding these elements that we can achieve such character, and our ethical ideas lose their value except in such an estimate of this condition of our life.

If the natural be allowed to obliterate the moral, violence is done to the essential ethical ideas. Freedom and responsibility are crowded out. Ought loses its sacredness. Reason fails of its highest exercise. 'Good' would have a totally different and subversive interpretation.



If, on the other hand, moral life be conceived apart from such association with material things, it loses all reality and effectiveness and becomes a luxury of sentiment or an impotent dream. It is necessary to vindicate Christian ethics in both these directions.

3. *The complete interpretation of nature must be ethical.* We have seen some purpose is essential to our understanding of the world. Scientific investigation is not its final explanation. We have also seen its aloofness from the moral life of man is incompatible with facts and the integrity of ethical life. The interpretation of nature in light of the moral problem is unescapable. Cosmology and teleology cannot be independent of the inner world of consciousness. If the notions of inner life in regard to conduct could be reduced to terms of the outer order of events, there would still remain inevitable questions as to the meaning of the universe so conceived. But human life could not be lived on the logical application of any theory of automatic fatalism.

What is practically impossible is on a very natural assumption theoretically false. While common sense is not adequate as a criterion of exact statement, it must be the aim of all



technical inquiry not to do violence to essential features of common life.

From the crude animism of primitive races to the mystic and poetical reverie of modern times, the instinct to find some spiritual interpretation of nature reveals itself. It is not merely the intuition of beauty. That has been felt in varying degree according to the sensibility of the individual. Whether it be the grandeur of the sky and mountain, or the charm of the meadow and its stream, from the rarest flower to the commonest,

Fringing the dusty road with harmless gold,

we are so made as to feel the power of harmonious vibrations of light and sound. But a purely physiological explanation degrades even our idea of beauty. We cannot give up the quest for goodness as well as beauty in the world around us.

There are moments

In which the burthen of the mystery,  
In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world  
Is lightened,<sup>1</sup>

and we 'see into the life of things.' How that

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey*.

sense of harmony can be justified, and what is its rational basis, is partly our business, since Christian ethics includes in its theory a moral interpretation of the natural world. The story of creation, and the 'glory of the children of God' (Rom. viii.), are linked by ethical meaning.

There is a Christian theory of divine immanence. The thought of the psalmist conveys the truth: 'If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me' (Ps. cxxxix. 8-10).

'In Him we live and move and have our being' (Acts xvii. 28), is St. Paul's statement of the truth pervading both Old and New Testament, that 'of Him and through Him and to Him are all things.'<sup>1</sup>

Further, the purpose of creation is 'good.' We have defined an 'end' as that which is the 'good' of the particular person. We cannot avoid making the inference that the end of nature must be absolute 'good'—i.e. 'good' free from all peculiarities and limitations. Unless the economy of the world were such, the realization of 'good' in the individual would be im-

<sup>1</sup> For a contrast between the immanence of theism and pantheism vide Flint, *Antitheistic Theory*, Lect. X.

possible; our life is so bound up with natural conditions.<sup>1</sup>

We believe that here is the first necessity of the Incarnation. It is the most consummate reconciliation of the duality of our own nature in a moral purpose, and an exhibition of the Creator's ordination of the material conditions for man's life. The divine nearness and personal concern in the affairs of men find thereby their loftiest expression. Man as a spiritual being outsoars in thought the bounds of space, and measures the past and future of time, thinks and acts in conscious freedom, aspires after the infinite and eternal, yet is limited to the clay cottage of this mortal frame. The supreme revelation of God, therefore, is incarnate and historic, not abstract. It is no monopoly of an intellectual aristocracy that can rise to its ethical description. It is full of inscrutable mystery; but it should be no charge against it that it is at the level of universal apprehension, and in harmony with the universal condition of human experience. Morality is for all, and while we believe the Incarnation to be the wisdom of God, and worthy of the homage of the highest intellects, nothing can give it a stronger presumptive claim upon

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Maguire *Lectures on Philosophy* Martensen, § 39.

our attention than its profound ethical meaning and fitness.

We are so made we but discern what's high,  
 What's great, what's noble, what's best worthy love  
 When it comes visible, incarnate, nigh.  
 Beauty were but a name, except it burned  
 Authentic in red glory of the rose,  
 Or in loved form or face desirable ;  
 And virtue needs must put white raiment on  
 And walk in sight ere men bend knee to her.<sup>1</sup>

There are, as we shall see, deeper considerations as to the meaning and fitness of the Incarnation when ethically construed ; but this initial suitability is specifically a glory of Christianity. It is the actual conditions of human life that must be met,

And so the Word had breath, and wrought  
 With human hands the creed of creeds  
 In loveliness of perfect deeds,  
 More strong than all poetic thought.<sup>2</sup>

## II. THE COMMUNITY

Whatever may be the metaphysical difficulty of explaining the independent existence of other persons besides ourselves, it is obviously a prime condition of moral life that there are such

<sup>1</sup> Edwin Arnold, *The Light of the World*, Book V.

<sup>2</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, xxxvi.

persons. If we look within we find that human conduct is distinguished by self-consciousness and freedom ; that reason in its highest exercise witnesses to man as a moral agent. If we look without we find that the environment of this moral life not only consists in material and natural circumstances, in which and through which the moral life is to be manifested, but that also a considerable part of the moral relations of life arise directly out of our association with our fellows.

The domestic, educational, commercial, friendly, civic, ecclesiastical, and philanthropic interests and occupations have all their moral significance mainly in the fact that they are the expression of men's necessary mutual dependence.

The ethical obligations which lie behind the right use of material things is complicated by our position as social beings. Others use and need what we use and need. Our well-being is mutually dependent. An isolated individual is inconceivable. Aristotle's alternative, that an unsocial being must be 'either a beast or a god,' needs qualification, since beasts have gregarious instincts. 'Cattle will grow thin on good pasture unless they brouse together,'<sup>1</sup> and even the divine Personality must have social relations.

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Martineau, *op. cit.* p. 43.

But apart from such thoughts, let us remember that duties and obligations first meet us in the form of imposed restraints from other persons outside. The particular home, age, and country in a large measure determined the manner of our first moral discipline, and even when the individual character develops, it is still in these channels that development is restricted. Ethics among the Greeks was dominated by the political aspect. It is clear ethics and politics are not to be confused. Plato in his *Republic* sought the virtues which must exist in the good citizen required for the existence of an ideal state. Aristotle made ethics a part of politics, and expounds the virtues of civic life according to practical necessity.<sup>1</sup>

As the thoughts of men broaden with experience, so do the theories of nations, and the civic virtue of Greek ethics comes to fuller comprehension in the 'wise man' of the Roman Stoics as a citizen of the world. But the expansion of view proved the insufficiency of the content of such a theory of virtue, and resulted in the vagueness and isolation of the stoic ideal.<sup>2</sup>

Failing to find its proper goal of social ethics,

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Mackenzie, *op. cit.* p. 278.

<sup>2</sup> Vide Sidgwick, *History of Ethics*, p. 51, &c.

because insufficiently equipped with an understanding of the deeper social relations of men, Roman Stoicism paradoxically became supremely individualistic. That which Stoicism lacked, Christianity possessed, and on the broader basis of a deeper interpretation of man's nature was laid the foundation of progressive social ethics. Christian ethics is supremely individualistic in its starting point in order that the deeper basis of our social relations may be discovered ; but it is supremely social in the breadth and fullness of its programme of duties, in the sanctions it implies, and the ultimate goal of moral endeavour.

Much of the controversy of English ethics has waged round this question of the relation of the individual to the community. Hobbes was obliged to find some counterpart for unlimited selfishness, with which he credited human nature, and by which he cynically explained benevolence ; and his political explanation of our observance of social duty provoked all the psychological analysis of conscience and benevolence so characteristic of English ethical inquiry. But it is interesting to notice that the line of development on both sides alike culminates in social theories.

Egoistic hedonism became modified to utili-



tarianism in Bentham and Mill, under the influence of Comte, and becomes still more broadly social in the evolutionary theories. While on the other hand, intuitionists are kindred to idealists from Kant to Hegel, and believe in the self-realization not only of the individual, but of society as a unity.

The necessary recognition of both egoism and altruism is forcefully dwelt upon by H. Spencer in his *Data of Ethics*, and he points out that either carried to extreme is self-destructive; and he teaches compromise, with the thought that the more completely society is developed the more will the two ends tend to become identical. An ideal society must presumably hold these two principles as reconcilable. The welfare of society cannot be perfect if the life of the individual is cramped and imperfect. The well-being of the individual must suffer if society be weakened.

Kant held that all rational beings constitute a kingdom of ends. Rational nature with him is equivalent to humanity. All rational beings are as such ends to each, and the ends aimed at by these become therefore ends for others as well. In harmony with this is Kant's rule: 'So act as to treat humanity in thine own person or that of any other, in every case as



an end, never simply as a means.’<sup>1</sup> Such is the necessity for recognizing the social aspect of ethical life.

It would be an interesting inquiry how far Christian teaching has affected ethical views outside any acknowledged allegiance; but it is certainly claimed for Christian ethics that there is no violent disconnexion from the development of the world. If there were it would be a presumption against its universal validity. All the light that sociology can bring to bear is welcome, and, so far as it goes, is in harmony with the evolution of society as illustrated in the Old Testament. We claim, however, that in the theocratic history of Israel there are elements of superiority that mark that nation out as the pioneers of moral and of spiritual progress. By their rigid exclusiveness of national heredity they preserved the continuity of their disciplinary history. By their instinct for the sacredness of genealogy they were nearer the true explanation of the race as a moral organism than any external patriotism or civic virtue could be. By their monotheism they had a secret of unity and stability amid the polytheisms by which they were surrounded.

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Hegel’s rule: ‘Be a person and respect other persons.’

By these elements they were prepared to be the recipients of a revelation the full significance of which is the most far-reaching explanation of the community of the race ever proclaimed to men.

In regard to social ethics, Christianity, while accepting all the progressive tendencies coming from every direction, has its unique features, its special contribution, and a place and progress inexplicable apart from its sublime claims ; and in the matter of man's relation to his fellow man, Christian ethics is particularly thorough. It is essentially cosmopolitan as well as true to the independence of the individual. Each one must 'work out his own salvation,' yet how far removed from mere egoism that is, is revealed by the close association of those who are 'members one of another.' The Christian theory of the nature of man reveals a solidarity of the race more compact and delicately interwoven than any theory of 'social tissue' can adequately express. It has confessedly been the most mighty philanthropic force that ever blessed the world.

How far it is possible for separate individuals to become one in the ethical and spiritual interests of life can only be fully felt when we consider the multitudinous varieties of

personal fellowship with the God-man Christ Jesus. How permeating may be the personality of One over many persons can only be realized by those who understand the promise, "Where two or three are met in My name, there am I in the midst."

### III. A PERSONAL GOD

It is the special province of Christian ethics to insist upon the adequate and accurate recognition of a Personal God as an objective condition of ethical life. It is the object of all anti-Christian theories to provide a scheme that shall eliminate such a necessity. We cannot survey the whole range of the controversy ; but the fact of a Personal God is a necessary corollary of what has already been said, and is vital to the Christian view of life, and we believe also crucial in the habits of men. Some cannot conceive of moral life without God ; but a disposition which finds the inquiry distasteful may fail to do justice to itself, however beautiful may be the exhibition of Christian character. Health depends first and foremost on pure air and wholesome food rather than chemistry. Still, chemistry has its service to health, and rational inquiry has its service to religion.

The conflict is against deism and pantheism on the one hand, and secularism or positivism and agnosticism on the other, but ethically considered their several conclusions are not so divergent as might seem. It matters little comparatively whether men allow a theory of the divine existence which, as in deism or pantheism, is impracticable, for ethical purposes ; or whether they deny the necessity of any such existence at all, like positivism or secularism ; or whether they refuse to grant the possibility of any knowledge of such a being, as agnosticism. They amount to the same result. What we seek is an explanation of the sense of obligation which we find attaches to conduct ; the 'ought' of good actions, and the condemnation of evil actions.

Within we find the necessity of personal freedom ; without we find the necessity of a Personal God. It is vain to look for an adequate correlative of man's moral consciousness in either of the objective conditions already described. While we saw the distinct quality of the relation which we bear to each, and their part in ethical life, the combined result of our interpretation is the necessity of a transcendent Personal God.

1. *With regard to nature*, no theory of

mere immanence is sufficient. The perception of the world around us requires the inference of intelligence behind nature. Consciousness demands that the purpose of that intelligence must be consistent with itself. It must be personal, and capable of moral relations as well as intellectual.

‘The Hebrew prophets are distinguished by their conviction that righteousness is the will of an omnipotent person, the creator of the material as well as of the moral universe; and consequently, that sooner or later it must work itself out in the material world. It must make the material world its own; it must triumph visibly.’

‘Ethical monotheism is their creation. They have themselves ascended to the belief in one only, holy, and righteous God, who realizes His will or moral good in the world, and they have by preaching and writing made that belief the inalienable property of our race’ (Kuenen, *Prophets of Israel*).<sup>1</sup>

The ethical monotheism of Judaism is remarkable not only for its theistic view of nature, already noticed, but for its promise of ethical satisfactions for the heart of man. ‘It is mind only that can reveal mind; it is character only

<sup>1</sup> Illingworth, *op. cit.* 84.

that can construe character.’<sup>1</sup> How to reconcile our conviction of the transcendence as well as the immanence of God may baffle philosophical ingenuity ; but we cannot therefore fall short of the adequate correlation of our moral nature.

It is usual to charge Christianity with anthropomorphism. The term is a modern adoption of an old idea, that man pictures God as like himself. Matthew Arnold<sup>2</sup> has attempted to attach to Christian teaching the slur that belongs to the gross humanism of heathen deities. To begin with, the charge is half robbed of its power by the contrast. To draw any parallel between the passions and petulance of mythological deities—these ‘mud-gods’—and the restrained and lofty conception of a personal god, is a superficiality peculiarly glaring in the light of ethics. Secondly, to condemn all personal relations between ourselves and ‘the not ourselves that makes for righteousness,’ is to destroy not only morals but knowledge. The power granted ‘makes’ and may be known to make, and unless the validity of these relative expressions be fully accepted, intelligence is drowned in an ocean of inexpressible unconsciousness. If there be a world beyond the ego, evidently

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Martineau, *op. cit.* Vol. II. Book I. § 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Literature and Dogma.*

it can only be apprehended through our modes of consciousness. 'To insist on its relativity to them as a reason for discharging it from existence, to distrust its voice because it is only their hearing, is to treat its self-proclamation as sufficient evidence of its non-existence, and render it impossible to report itself to our faculties, however real its being or intimate its presence.'<sup>1</sup>

It is equally illegitimate on such a line of reasoning to express the same facts in any known terms, and it is more irrational to be hylomorphic or biomorphic in theories of ultimate reality.<sup>2</sup> Much more so if terms of matter and force and unconscious life utterly fall short of explaining phenomena of consciousness. 'What paradox can be greater than to deduce the phenomena of character from an agency that has none.'<sup>3</sup>

And therefore we are convinced that our own personality is an index to the divine; anthropomorphism is repudiated. Rather, it is claimed that man is theomorphic, and so far as personality is concerned is not greater than God; which means that our personality is derived from God, not arbitrarily attributed to Him.

<sup>1</sup> Martineau, op. cit. p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Vol. I. p. 333.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 46.

Any impersonal idea of God is but an abstraction of some feature of our personality or some phase of natural phenomena, and insufficient to explain or satisfy man's intellectual and ethical needs.

Equally unsuccessful is the attempt to rest on pantheism. Voluntary action must also be saved from absorption, as well as from annihilation, not only in the interest of morals but of intellectual consistency. No man can exercise his own will nor believe in another's without passing beyond the limits of self-enclosed being. 'He cannot declare himself a pantheist without self-contradiction. In so doing he reserves his own personality as a thinking and assertive power that deals with all else as objective.'<sup>1</sup>

Theism demands that God be more than the contents of nature and overpass them, and by the constitution of our minds we cannot escape from the necessity.

2. The pre-eminent necessity for our recognition of a Personal God as the supreme objective condition of our ethical life is demonstrated no less when we consider *the social aspect of morals*.

While the social relations of man are the occasion of duties to our fellows, opportunities

<sup>1</sup> Martineau, op. cit. II. p. 177.



of heroism and philanthropy, and the inevitable means of our moral education, they are insufficient of themselves to explain the authority and compass of moral obligation.

Let it be granted that sociology has valuable light to throw upon the processes of ethical development; that both the most primitive institutions and the most complicated, as part of the social environment of man, explain much in the form and fashion of conduct that is approved: sociology has a different sphere from ethics, and cannot supersede the search for an ideal above all racial and periodical variations of standard. Moral laws of the state may be regarded as the result of a long-continued effort of society to conserve itself, and adjust the life of the individual to its own health and progress; but they cannot explain the authority of the inward life by reason of which the individual obeys or criticizes the statute, and which enforces obligations beyond the limits of legislation. It is urged that this authority is the embodiment of public opinion and the ideal aggregate of sentiment, made up of praise and blame which men bestow upon what helps or hurts their interests. What a powerful organization can do to coerce the individual let the history of despotisms, hierarchies, and empires

bear witness ; yet those very histories bear witness also to men's eternal revolt against their wrongs. 'Must' is not the same as 'ought,' and 'it is useless to borrow millenniums in order to turn it into duty.'<sup>1</sup>

Hobbes, James Mill, Bentham, and Bain all strove to explain moral sentiment into self-regard, and all objective authority into social opinion. This is the meaning of utilitarianism—an attempt to find in all virtue and regard for others latent or modified selfishness. Tested by the criterion of common language nothing could be more confounding. In all nations and ages the distinction between virtue and interest prevails. Though they may coincide, they are never confused, and often are in direct opposition. When virtue and self-interest conflict, then it is that moral grandeur is recognized and the hero and martyr win their crown. That honesty is the best policy depends very much upon the criminal code and the police force ; but virtue has another basis.

It is sometimes stated that, in order to explain the conflict between egoism and altruism, that religion steps in with rewards and penalties of a future life, which if they be allowed will of course be overwhelming as sanctions of obliga-

<sup>1</sup> Martineau, *op. cit.* II. pp. 9-10.

tion ; but that this is also a form of selfishness resting upon an uncertain metaphysical basis, and inapplicable to all mankind therefore.

Stated in this crude fashion it may appear true ; but it must be born in mind first that such partial view of God as a Moral Governor is inaccurate, and secondly, that the non-acceptance of this basis of moral life is not *ipso facto* a disproof of its rationality or reality. Further, it may be urged that the acceptance of such a theory, crude as it is, is nearer universal acceptance than any other.<sup>1</sup> But that it is not an adequate rationale of moral obligation in relation to our fellows we admit. We do not rest in arbitrary divine decree (e.g. Occam, Pascal, Paley). Right is not right because God wills it ; but God wills it because it is right.

Christian ethics has sometimes been condemned as giving a merely jural view of ethics ; that is to say that moral obligations are depicted under the forms of the law-court and forensic terms. Let the charge be in part admitted. The analogy of judicial procedure and the limitation of such figures of speech have wrought great harm in theology and Christian ethical teaching. But is it an altogether illogical and unjustifiable procedure to find in legal

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Illingworth, *op. cit.* Lect. III,

crystallizations of the social order types and clues for the representation of the eternal order, of which human laws and customs are partial and transient expression?

If we say that God is Judge, does it not mean that behind the scenery of human institutions we expect the re-echo of our moral judgements in the hearts of our fellows, because our conviction of its sacredness is the outcome of eternal justice, and that there is a deeper and higher harmony in the universe of spirits than we can find in legal institutions.

It is sometimes stated that religion has supplemented ethics with new duties, added another sphere of obligation by the recognition of God. This is likewise a mis-statement of the true aspect of the question. Every natural group of human beings has its own system of duties and rights, but as science seeks the co-ordination of sciences, and the correlation of its forces, and is ever tending towards unity, so the conscience of man seeks unity in the one spiritual authority of a Personal God. 'Once bend before the authority of God and you can reserve nothing from it : it covers every obligation ; it is not that it creates another and separate sphere of duties, and adds a department to the claims upon the human will, but that it

transfigures and elevates the work and affections of every relation, be it domestic, social, or political. The moment the two truths are apprehended, of the spiritual unity of our nature and the All-righteous as its Source and Head, the idea inevitably follows of a kingdom of God: for it has no binding laws that are not His; no offences that are not sins; no just penalties that are not the expression of His will; no noble passages of history that are not the march of His advancing providence. The theocratic conception of society rests upon indestructible foundations in our nature, and must for ever return unless that nature become atheistic.' <sup>1</sup>

The conviction Dr. Martineau thus eloquently states, is yet not the last word upon this matter. The ethical instinct that finds human law inadequate cannot find legal phraseology adequate in the higher plane of divine obligation. It contains an element of truth, but character is a matter of life, of growth; and what that life and growth entails of personal relationship we must seek to know.

Further, what this relationship entails in our conception of the divine nature belongs to theology; but ethical requirement lies at the

<sup>1</sup> Martineau, *op. cit.* II. 50.

back of the doctrine of the Trinity. Personality means more than the apparent simplicity of unitarian statement accepts. If we are not to fall back from theism to the pantheism from which we seek to lift the sacredness of moral obligation, we must think of God Himself in social conditions adequate to the entire moral needs of our nature.<sup>1</sup> Enough, however, has been given to show not merely the necessity for the inclusion of a Personal God as among the objective conditions of man's life ; but that that supreme personal relationship between man and God is inclusive and interpretative of all other objective conditions ; not absorbing, nor destroying, but productive of unity and harmony.

<sup>1</sup> Fairbairn, *Christ in Modern Theology*, Book III. Div. II.

## CHAPTER IV

### *THE MORAL CONFLICT,<sup>1</sup>*

WE have now reached a stage when we must review the field of ethical inquiry in order to draw attention to a feature in human conduct of deep and urgent importance.

Starting with the primary value of the word 'ought,' as rung down so to speak upon the counter of common consciousness and tested by an analysis of its intrinsic worth, we came to certain conclusions as to the nature of man as a moral agent. Our next care has been to estimate the ethical environment of man so far as it admits of universal description, and alike in harmony with what we believe to be the actual facts of the case and rational examination. We have sought at the same time to show how these facts of inner and outer life correspond with the Christian appeal to man's

<sup>1</sup> Vide Denny, *Studies in Theology*, Chap. IV.; Wace, *Morality and Christianity*, Lect. V., Martensen, §§ 28-30; Dorner, pp. 311-325.

moral consciousness. There is yet one more aspect of the actual life of man which must be noticed before we pass to the standard of conduct.

The word 'ought' carries in it not only intimations of man's highest capacity and noblest endeavour, but also the revelation of his utmost humiliation and appeal for compassion, his highest honour and most heroic strife. As indicative of man's lofty aspirations it towers far above all other claims to dominate his action ; as indicative of the contrast of actual life to his ideal it is charged with tones of highest resolve, plaintive regret, or bitter scorn. No theory can evade the struggle of man's life which finds its most tragic meaning in the light of this one word. The activity which we observe in plants and animals, since there is no evidence of self-consciousness, is at best only a faint foreshadowing of that self-development which is the prerogative of the spiritual life of men. In the lower forms of life there is an adaptation to environment, and the realization of that which is potential or latent, or involved in the organic life, and which is reached by stages of progress. We may with a lower meaning term it the realization of an ideal. But while man has also this relation to his environment; there is yet another apparently incongruous



and incompatible element in his life. The triumph over nature in this lower aspect is itself natural and instinctive on the part of animals and man, in so far as that side of his being alone is affected. The instinctive impulses, however, lead to contradictions, strife, and perplexity of a peculiar and special kind.<sup>1</sup> 'That is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual'; yet as soon as we regard the distinctive features of man's life, we find reason and appetite at variance. Nature wills an end of which it knows nothing. Animals and men alike share its seeming cruelty and disregard of life, but they share alike its partial restraints upon impulses. Excess brings its retributions to the intemperate and glutton. Each appetite prompts to the gratification of the moment. But we are conscious of higher considerations, purposes that pass beyond and subordinate particular pleasure of the moment to higher ends. To the horizon of human conduct there is no fixed limit short of the universal purpose of the world; but whether in the case of the individual it be narrower or wider in one than another, there is from the first a conscious strife as soon as

<sup>1</sup> Cp. John Caird, *Introduction to Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 261-75.

ethical ideas have place. From the first there is the evidence, 'no man can serve two masters.' Even though he evade and avoid the evil consequences of excess so that in mind, body, and social standing he incurs no penalty of an equivalent kind as compared with the less cunning wrong-doer who suffers more for less evil, yet there is an essential antagonism between the loftier sentiments and ideals of life and the grosser and coarser and selfish aims.

It may even happen that in fidelity to the noble and heroic sentiments, a man may suffer the violence of his environment natural and social, and suffer in body or reputation because not disobedient to the 'heavenly vision,' a higher duty and more sacred interests than his own advantage, or even than the advantage of the community as apprehended by its members as a community.

Such are the complications of this conflict, that if the rational powers be divorced from ethical ends and used for merely material ends, they become intensified in evil. Reason may become

Procuress to the Lords of Hell.

The simplicity and innocence of the mere child of nature is not for rational man. If with him the natural dominates reason as a slave, he becomes fiendish rather than brutal, and the

bondservant of a blind selfishness working self-destruction. Where reason is used as a protection in prudential forms alone, the loss is none the less tragic if less revolting. For wealth, power, fame, if not sought so that cold cruelty develop a Napoleon or a plutocrat, yet in the withering and decay of nobler capacities the Nemesis becomes apparent in the cynic and the miser. Man can never satisfy the truer self in transient material possessions.

Yet these are extreme cases of that which is illustrated in every heart—the conflict between higher and lower possibilities of conduct. It is this which makes deliberation, in the light of the ‘ought’ of moral obligation, fraught with such intense emotion and tremendous issues. If the choice has to be made between lands and houses full of treasure or fidelity to the well-being of son or daughter, to the trust of a friend, to public duty or private honour, there can be no doubt on which side ‘ought’ lies. If the alternative material loss be greater, even to the last demand of life itself, the sacred authority of the ‘ought’ remains, however fierce the strife.

No measurement of material results can alter the verdict. A city of prudently profligate or successful thieves and well-groomed cowards could not ennoble their sumptuous demoralization,

We still honour the striving and suffering hero and the dying martyr.

The cause of the struggle is the demand for the surrender of the natural self-regarding impulses to the higher and wider purposes of spiritual life. And it is in the approval of such surrender that words like 'merit' and 'virtue' have their meaning. The social organism creates its institutions and imposes its restrictions upon individual action, and estimates the value of conduct accordingly; but in the struggle of the inward life the result is not always in harmony with 'social sanctions.' Personal remorse and condemnation may contradict social approval, or self-approval may be preserved in contradiction to social blame.

We are brought to the deep mystery of our self-conscious life. The two alternatives of conduct meet in the personal identity and the supreme authority within. 'I am at once the combatants and the conflict and the field that is torn by the strife; the serf who struggles to be free, the tyrant that enslaves him, and the scene of the internecine conflict between them.'<sup>1</sup>

When thus we enter within our own consciousness we pass to the mystery of ethical life. But from an examination of the moral

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Religion*, I.

conflict thus far we have two thoughts that are forced upon us by the tangle between morality and expediency.

1. *The inadequacy of rational self-direction, restricted within the limits of mere natural wants,* to set at rest the strife and at the same time satisfy the higher claims of moral obligation.

2. *The inadequacy of the natural order to justify and requite the choice of the noblest considerations.* Whether there is any ultimate vindication remains to be seen.

But there is another fact to be emphasized :

3. *The result of the conflict is not victory.* Indeed, the sense of defeat is constant and universal. It does not seem an even fight. In the moral chances of human conduct the dice seem loaded in favour of evil ; yet the sentence passed within has painful results. In extreme cases this sense of guilt forms the tragedy of history. It is the haunting spectre that robs successful villany of quietness. It is the detective that forces the surrender of the criminal under its hypnotic spell. The wrong-doer

Ever bears about  
A silent court of justice in his breast,  
Himself the judge and jury, and himself  
The prisoner at the bar, ever condemned.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tennyson, *Sea Dreams*.

This is the most terrible retribution of a King Richard III, and makes visible the invisible stain to a Lady Macbeth.<sup>1</sup>

Not only so. The sense of guilt may appear often out of all proportion to the actual evil committed. Let it be granted there are cases of morbid exaggeration and melancholy, yet it is a mark of loftier estimates of life when a man passes beyond the narrow limits of superficial praise or blame. Associated with noblest examples of character, this sense of inward condemnation cannot lightly be set aside. It is the result of greater sensibility and more delicate judgement.

The fifty-first Psalm and the first chapter of the Epistle of the Romans are a challenge to those who would belittle the early sentiment and meaning of primitive religious custom. The primitive ceremonial must not obscure the ethical beginnings enshrined in them. Rather, wonder is created at the bright flashes of ethical meaning from behind the primitive ritual of religion, whereby it becomes evidence of this fact in man's moral history and condition.

Noblest natures have born witness to the strange bent of evil and associated condemnation.

<sup>1</sup> Vide Davison, *The Christian Conscience*, Chap. V.

Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor.<sup>1</sup>  
'The good which I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I practise' (Rom. vii. 19); and it is this which in varying degree is the experience of common life. The failures, misdeeds, the lost opportunities and deliberate wickedness of life, are the problem of ethics after all. And in Christian ethics they are traced to their source within and explained as the individual revolt against supreme righteousness in God.

By the term sin it provides for its multitudinous forms and common inward character. Whatever may be the incidental nature of wrong-doing, or the partial and relative standard transgressed, by this term the depths of consciousness are sounded and the highest heights of righteousness appear. No ordinary case of a 'divided self' explains this tragic schism, though witness be born to its existence in most various directions<sup>2</sup>—Buddha, Solomon, Seneca, Augustine, Luther, Bunyan, Tolstoi. Take for example Seneca's frank confession of the evil bias of human nature: 'We have all sinned, some gravely, others less grievously;

<sup>1</sup> *Ovid*, Met. VII. 20-1.

<sup>2</sup> Vide W. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Chap. VI.-VIII.



some deliberately, others under impulse or carried away by evil example. Some of us have stood in good counsels with little firmness, and have involuntarily and reluctantly lost our innocence ; we not only come short, but we will continue to do so to the end of life. If any one has so well purged his mind that nothing can any more disturb him, he has still come to innocence through sin.' <sup>1</sup>

Sin is an explanation of the conflict which locates the cause in the human will. It is a collision against the divine will within the range of contingent liberty characteristic of human life. It does not follow that the full scope of our conduct is understood by each ; but whatever be the stage of development or the instrument or standard for the realization of the ideal in the life of man, sin is the word which gives the truest and highest import to our conscious short-comings. 'By the law is the knowledge of sin'—whatever the law may be. By remembering this we are saved from misapprehension as to the nature of the conflict.

1. *It is not merely a matter of ignorance.* Virtue cannot altogether be resolved into

<sup>1</sup> De Clementia, Chap. VI.



knowledge<sup>1</sup> and vice into ignorance, although the relationship is often very close. The transition from a mistake to wisdom gained by experience is of another kind from the transition from conscious wrong-doing to goodness. It is the contradiction of knowledge that creates the sense of blame. 'With fingers dreadfully burnt we play with the fire.'

As there is growth in knowledge, so there may be development in ethical life ; but there may be retrogression rather than progression. Intellectual enlightenment is by no means always combined with moral improvement. The relation of religion and culture is such that history utters no uncertain verdict as to the independence of intellectual and moral progress.<sup>2</sup> Knowledge as a factor in moral development has special meaning and importance, but it is not the lack of knowledge in the general sense which explains the moral conflict of the human heart. Perplexity of duty is not to be identified with the sense of guilt. It is where perplexity is absent that the sense of guilt begins.

2. *It is not explained as between the*

<sup>1</sup> Socrates and Plato.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. 'Religion and Culture,' *Preacher's Magazine*, June, 1903.

*individual and the community.* The character of this moral conflict makes impossible any attempt to absorb ethics in sociology. Sociology may trace the development of social standards, but the progress as one of moral advancement must justify itself at the bar of personal consciousness.

The conflict includes and pervades the community rather than originates in personal relation thereto. The moralizing or demoralizing of any company of men implies a moral constant from which both the society as well as the individual may and does diverge. It is the individual revolt which delays and retards the social improvement. It is the social degeneracy that destroys its moral reformers. In both directions we have evidence of the disruption between the actual and ideal which is the problem of morality.

The spread of civilization is one thing, the moral elevation of mankind another. Bad education and bad institutions are the cause of much evil ; but they must themselves be ethicized if they are to counteract the evil. Education and institutions are instrumental social causes, but they do not in themselves define the end for which they are used. Social morality is at best the identification of the individual with the progressive life of finite development. The

ideal end must be otherwise determined. The witness of that is found in the inward character of the moral conflict, and the relation in which it places man, both to nature and the community. Let it be admitted that man's moral conflict is in some important aspects a conflict between selfishness and regard for others, or altruism. Self-sacrifice has here its most magnificent opportunity. What we claim is that such opposition neither exhausts nor explains all the phases of this fight. Herbert Spencer, in his *Data of Ethics*, effectively describes the claims of both self-regarding, and other-regarding aspects of duty, and anticipates their gradual approximation to each other. We accept the position. But the vindication of both must be in the comprehension of both under a higher unifying principle, and their approximation to each other will be ruled by that.

The social organism is only metaphorically a unity.<sup>1</sup> It has no essential personality. The unifying principle of all persons we find in God, and the explanation of moral strife in personal relation of will to Him. Sin, as individual, racial, and radical, we believe to be the key of the problem. Sin is corporate as well as individual. No convention or majority can

<sup>1</sup> D'Arcy, op. cit. Part I. App. II.

absolve a community from the sacred obligations of right, and no aspect of the moral conflict is more tragic and impressive than the inability of generations to pronounce their own absolution from common transgression. The national appeals of Jewish prophets are full of this pathetic consciousness.

3. *The secret of the conflict is not in material conditions.* Though moral evil goes often hand in hand with physiological disorder, there is no specific microbe or bacillus that can be designated as locating the evil in the physiological system.<sup>1</sup> Rather, disease takes its place as the outcome of spiritual evil in the existing constitution of nature. Morality is more than blind racial groping after health, and while the conditions of life may tend to hinder moral progress and need themselves to be reformed, the conflict is deeper. Air, soap, diet, and medicine may do much to make men more agreeable beings, but even in such domestic wholesomeness both socially and individually their use must have a stimulus and end equal to the needs of man's nature. It is the rational ideal that prompts even social reform, and we must deal with the inner springs of action to achieve any permanent result. Faults of character are not cured in

<sup>1</sup> Cp. W. L. Watkinson, *Transfigured Sackcloth*, Chap. II. §

any other way. Sin is not the monopoly of cripples in slums. We venture to think it is more often the reverse; that sin abounds more among the able and well-to-do, by reason of greater opportunity of self-gratification. Finally, the moral conflict pervades all life, and it is just this pervasiveness and independence that may give seeming trifles accentuated merit or evil, and make even passive inaction complicity with evil in a world where moral neutrality is impossible.<sup>1</sup>

The doctrine of original sin has bearing on this problem.

(i) It explains the dark shadow of the word 'ought' in harmony with the examination of human nature given as a deep and universal malady. What we mean by the 'Fall' does not demand theological treatment.<sup>2</sup> The doctrine, however, recognizes the moral conflict, and explains it as the distinctive feature of our effort after the right and the good; the initial minus quantity of the equation.

(ii) The doctrine emphasizes the solidarity of

<sup>1</sup> Compare the story of Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda*, and her distress at seeing *her wish outside her* in the death of Grandcourt.

<sup>2</sup> See an interesting chapter (VI.) on the 'Natural History of Sin,' in Griffith Jones's *Ascent through Christ*.

the race. The dominance of evil is partly due at least to the 'objectified heredity' of past transgressions. In its linking of the present with the past it is vindicated by examination into the laws of ancestry.

(iii) It includes the whole creation as somehow under the baleful spell and effect of sin. 'The creation was subjected to vanity not of its own will, but by reason of Him who subjected it in hope' (Rom. viii. 21).

'In scripture evil and the principle of evil are not conceived in a purely spiritual way, nor could this be the case in a world of fleshly constitution, where the spiritual has the sensuous for its basis and its vehicle. Spiritual evil exists as a power immanent in cosmical nature' (Beck).<sup>1</sup>

Sin entered into the world (Rom. v. 12), and by reason of its infection of our nature St. Paul declared, 'I see a different law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members' (Rom. vii 14-23 ; cp. 1 John iii. 8. &c.). The Johannine conception of 'the world' expresses this comprehensive view of the domain of evil. It is on the same bold scale that the antidote and moral dynamic of

<sup>1</sup> Vide Dr. G. G. Findlay, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, Chap. VII. pp. 103-4.

the evangelical salvation is presented, yet with equal adaptation to the needs of individual experience.

(iv) It associates evil with death. The 'retrogressive forces' that have taken possession of mankind, if not the explanation of the origin of death, are yet clearly identified with death as one of the possible issues of the moral conflict in the following ways. It is the natural retribution of reckless neglect of the rational regulation of impulses and passions. It is the socially recognized penalty and prevention in 'capital punishment.' It is the most terrible expression of anti-social feeling in murder and suicide.

Further, then, in its 'retroactive energy as a natural force' we may discern a wide-spread consequence of the cosmical disorder of which the sense of sin or guilt is the nearest, most impressive and significant revelation; and of the full consequence of that disorder death has become the most solemn symbol.

There are other aspects of death that suggest ethical problems; but this bearing of death upon the life of man as in a state of disorder and strife can hardly be gainsaid. It has aspects unmistakably other than natural in the affairs of men, as they actually exist. In proportion as the meaning of the moral conflict



be explained on the lines of optimistic goodness, death loses its terrors. In proportion as the conflict results in surrender to evil, death is an event sought in desperation or anticipated in despair.

The full scope of the problem thus started is very wide. Once adopt the explanation of sin as the root cause of the strange contradiction of our nature, and we not only find the material creation involved, but our thoughts of God as well. If we accept the fact that the 'Flesh lusteth against the spirit, and spirit against the flesh, for these two are contrary the one to the other,' we are started upon the problem of the moral order of the universe and the origin of evil. The ancient and modern forms of dualism<sup>1</sup> are at least witnesses of the conflict which is the great fact from which Christian ethics starts.

How to avoid dualism and explain the origin of evil are difficulties by no means the monopoly of Christianity.<sup>2</sup> They appear insoluble.<sup>3</sup> All we claim is, that the theory of original sin is most comprehensive in its solution of many

<sup>1</sup> Vide Bruce, *The Moral Order of the World*, Lect. X.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. *Evil and Evolution*, by G. F. Millin.

<sup>3</sup> Isa. xlv.-7 and Wisdom i. 13 hardly have reference to this ultimate question.



partial aspects of the question ; that it is in truest harmony with the consciousness of mankind ; and that to refuse this explanation is not to provide a positive equivalent. Any explanation must be tested by fidelity to the considerations whereby the Christian doctrine is commended ; its close fidelity to actual experience ; its offer of optimistic interpretation.

## CHAPTER VI

### *THE HIGHEST GOOD; ANTITHETICAL THEORIES*

THE questions which have been thus far considered are preparatory to the central or main topic. That is, they lead up to the question, What is the meaning of the 'good' and the 'right.' Our thought passes beyond particular actions, or even classes of actions, to discover if possible what is the common quality of those which are approved. Its aim is to discover a universal criterion of conduct. How far we can approach such a unification among precepts and principles prevailing among men is part of the history of ethics. The aim is inevitable. It is the reaction of our reason upon our moral education. Is there a common base for right actions? Is there a secret harmony among moral maxims? Is there a chief end or highest good according to which conduct may be intelligently ordered?

The use of the terms 'standard,' 'highest good'

or *summum bonum*, 'chief end,' or 'ideal' all indicate this attempt. Their meaning varies according to the point of view from which the subject is approached. A standard is the rule of conduct according to which acts are to be measured. It is the embodiment of an ideal. It cannot rest on its own authority. The codification of laws implies a unifying principle, and an ideal means that which interprets a moral standard. It means a description of moral excellence as calculated to attain an end desired. An absolute ideal has persistent and rightful dominion as the means of attainment of a chief end over all possible ends of human life. Conduct is called right by reason of its conformity to standard, and the right is the attainment of the chief end. The chief end finds its justification as the highest good. It implies that the chief end is not something arbitrarily imposed upon man, but something which his own judgement must approve as desirable. It will thus be seen that while the phases of the question differ, a conception of the highest good is a *sine qua non* of ethics.

First, then, a merely relative standard is denied. When every man does that which is right in his own eyes (cp. Judges xvii. 6; xxi. 25), the only result is anarchy. Such a doctrine

can only be the outcome of scepticism as to any rational system of life.

Every individual, it is true, has to interpret the most simple rule or most absolute principle into terms of his own conduct. Our duties are our own. 'Each one of us shall give an account of himself' (Rom. xiv. 13), and 'bear his own burden' (Gal. vi. 5). But if there were no standard or authority outside individual judgement, there could be no universal rule corrective of mistake and educative of character. It is true, in face of the social condition of life, that right actions are in a sense relative. The doctor and the patient, buyer and seller, the teacher and pupil, the parent and child, the master and servant, men and women, all have reciprocal duties based upon the relation implied in such terms. 'To do my duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me' is the particular problem of personal life. But we are in search of an embracing principle or principles under which all duties may be subsumed or assimilated, and in light of which they may be interpreted.

It is necessary to safeguard our interpretation of ethical obligation from errors arising from partial disregard of the comprehensive nature of the ideal we require. These errors are caused

by misapprehension of the specific quality of the ethical requirement, or by abstraction of one part of the complex events of conduct. They are antithetical in that they place one part of man's life in opposition to another, and do not succeed in harmonizing all the elements of our experience. Not that these antithetical and partial views are necessarily or totally at fault; but they do not meet the needs of the case by reason of their partiality, which in certain cases becomes not only inadequate, but also misleading.

In endeavouring to classify these types of ethical theory it is not possible to do them full justice, neither can they be always marked off rigidly one from the other. A type is an illustration or example of a class by reason of the possession of the leading characteristics of that class. So in examining types of other than Christian standards of conduct and character, it is only intended to show in what points they appear to fall short of the necessities of the case. They contain partial truth, and in some cases have done invaluable service to the cause of morality. In others, the influence for good, whatever may have been the intention of the original thinkers, is not so apparent. We believe in Jesus Christ we have the most perfect and comprehensive

Ideal, and the most powerful ethical Force the world has ever received. 'The most powerful moral lever ever applied to the affairs of men' (Lecky).

There are two lines of descent from the problem as started by Socrates as to the nature of the good. One can be traced historically through Aristippus, Epicurus, Hobbes, Hume, Bentham, Mill, Sidgwick, Spencer, Stephens. The other through Antisthenes, Zeno, the Cartesians, Cudworth, Reid, Kant, Martineau, Green. The contrast between such theories may roughly be described as between natural impulse and reason. Still, this by no means exhausts the various schools, neither does it include some of the greatest names who, in a measure, rise above the opposition described, such as Plato and Aristotle, Spinoza, Hegel. In these, ethics is part of a great speculative system.

Martineau classifies theories by their psychological character. While it is justifiable so far as the psychological facts of moral consciousness must be regarded, it is hardly a complete or final treatment of the problem of ethics. The basis is broader than Martineau's intuitional psychological position.

1. It is not satisfactory to seek a solution of the ethical problem with regard to the

highest good in the *material* conditions of *Hedonism*.<sup>1</sup>

The first abstraction of the moral problem is to ignore the peculiar feature of human conduct as guided by rational considerations of the special and peculiar quality we have observed. It throws the burden on the external conditions of life as sufficient to solve the question, What is good? It makes sensibility the measure of goodness and pleasure the *summum bonum*. This is characteristic of a succession of schools of thought, though by pressure of the facts of the case inconsistent elements are often combined.

The pleasure theory originates with Aristippus, the disciple of Socrates and founder of Cyrenaicism. Having learned from Socrates the value of insight into the consequences of actions, he regarded pleasures of a natural kind as supreme, rather than those of the soul; and under the influence of Protagoras the sophist regarded the pleasure of the moment as the only reality.

<sup>1</sup> The following give fuller treatment of hedonistic theories : James Seth, *Study of Ethical Principles*, Part. I Chap. I. ; Muirhead, *Elements of Ethics*, Book III. Chap. I and III. ; W. Wallace, *Epicureanism*, Chap. VII. ("Chief Ancient Philosophies") ; Mackenzie, *Manual*, Book II. Chap. IV. ; J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* ; H. Spencer, *Data of Ethics* ; Leslie Stephen, *Science of Ethics* ; Sidgwick, *History of Ethics* ; Martineau, *Types of Ethical Theory*, Vol. II. &c.

‘A life of feeling pure and simple, heedless and unthinking, undisturbed by reason is the Cyrenaic ideal.’<sup>1</sup> This policy has always had representatives. ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’ (1 Cor. xv. 32). It is found in Horace, Lucretius, Byron, the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. As modified in Epicureanism there is recognition of reason as the servant of natural sensibility. It is clear any admission of reason is destructive of the theory ; yet, even prudence demands self-possession, self-control, if life is not to be torn by fierce appetites and passions. A life tossed hither and thither by fleeting desires of natural good can only attain to restless misery in the case of rational beings.

It is true the philosophic pleasure of Epicurus is not of the sensual kind generally regarded as allowed by his teaching, and the pessimistic phase of avoidance of pain comes rather to the front. The prudence and indifference of Epicurus is after all near akin to Stoicism, though based upon totally different considerations. It is just these different considerations which lead to fatal consequences in the common interpretation of pleasure as ‘the alpha and omega of a blessed life, our first and kindred good.’<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> James Seth, *op. cit.* p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of Epicurus to Menœcius, Wallace, *op. cit.* p. 129.



In English thought, Hobbes (1640-51) is the first representative of egoistic hedonism. On the basis of a materialistic explanation of experience he regards pleasure as 'helping vital action,' and pain as 'hindering' it. Hence each man's appetites and aversions are to be followed. Regard for others is only selfishness disguised, and the restraints of society are secured by the convention of government. 'Selfishness everywhere and unlimited power somewhere' is the paradox of his position.

Paley (1743-1805) is after all not far removed from Hobbes in regarding the basis of benevolence as consisting in the fact that we 'ought to seek the happiness of mankind in obedience to the will of God for the sake of everlasting happiness.' Such a statement may be vindicated, but in its selfish crude interpretation it is subversive of the ethical character. It is fair to say, with regard to such a statement of the case, might can never create right, not even divine might.

Various modifications have been introduced by subsequent thinkers, notably in *Utilitarianism*.

Bentham is the original modifier of the selfishness of previous hedonistic theory. His criterion of the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number,' and his maxim 'each to count for one and no one for more than one,' inspire

certain socialistic theories of to-day ; while his theory of the external 'sanctions'<sup>1</sup> of morality is an attempt to find a rational basis for social control of individual action.

J. S. Mill is representative (1) of the scientific interpretation of good as merely natural well-being, and (2) of the attempt to introduce a *qualitative* discrimination rather than a mere *quantitative* estimate of pleasure.

Pleasure is to be measured not merely by its 'continuance and intensity' (Paley), nor by its 'certainty, propinquity,' freedom from consequent pain, and fruitfulness of other pleasure (Bentham) ; but by qualitative differences of higher and lower which 'those who are acquainted with both' shall decide. He finds apart from such authority a 'sense of dignity' in higher pleasures, and concludes, 'It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied. It is better to be Socrates than a fool. And if the fool or the pig is of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party of the comparison knows both sides.'<sup>2</sup>

All this is perfectly true, but it is drifting

<sup>1</sup> By *sanction* is meant a penalty or reward attached to conduct.

<sup>2</sup> *Utilitarianism*, Chap. II.

away from hedonism. It is a recognition of some higher principle as umpire among pleasures. It utterly obscures the personal and relative meaning of pleasure. Already happiness has taken its place, and needs itself to have a larger interpretation. Pleasure, as far as it is only pleasure, is the same both for higher and lower natures, and any qualification means a rational system of life. The 'external sanctions themselves must vindicate their right ; produce their birth certificate.'<sup>1</sup> It is not what does control the action of the individual ; but the ethical right of control.

Sidgwick attempts to find the rational or *logical* basis in universal happiness. He says, 'When the egoist offers a proposition that his happiness and pleasure is good not only for himself but absolutely, he gives the ground needed for such a proof. For we can then point out to him that his happiness cannot be a more important part of good taken universally than the equal happiness of any other person, and thus starting with his own principle he must accept the wider notion of universal happiness or pleasure as representing the real end of reason, the absolutely good or desirable.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> James Seth, *op. cit.* p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> *Methods of Ethics*, Book III. Chap. XIII. p. 143.

The statement shows how far advance has been made from egoistic hedonism pure and simple, but the definition of happiness is still required, and the ground of the universal aim.

It is just here that the development of *evolutionary ethics*, which Sidgwick ignores, comes to the rescue.

The optimistic conception of adaptation to natural environment as the goal of happiness is suggested by Mill; but it is under the evolutionary theories of Darwin, H. Spencer, Leslie Stephen, and Professor Alexander that they take definite shape. Adopting the term altruism from Comte, Spencer declares the universal end as preservation and development of life,<sup>1</sup> and a gradual approximation with egoism as civilization progresses. Leslie Stephen's theory of the social organism, 'social tissue,' and social welfare, Professor Alexander's conception of goodness as consisting in social equilibrium,<sup>2</sup> and Professor Clifford's 'tribal self,' are alike in the fundamental similarity of their ethical views.

But the position is not really different when mere material explanations of ethics are put in biological and social form. In the first place, the harmony between ethical and cosmical

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Data*, pp. 227, 229.

<sup>2</sup> *Moral Order and Progress*.

processes is not established on rational grounds. Professor Huxley as an evolutionist is quoted with effect as repudiating such a position. He regards them as antagonistic.<sup>1</sup> Leslie Stephen's statement is the same. 'The attempt to establish an absolute coincidence between virtue and happiness, is in ethics what the attempt to square the circle or to discover perpetual motion is in geometry and mechanics.'<sup>2</sup>

Certainly, actions, measured as good or bad by their adaptation to achieve prescribed ends of a material kind, will never square with the character of our moral ideas. Man is more than a sentient being, and there are elements of human life which cannot be reduced to such terms.

Character is degraded from its throne of excellence by such theories. The good man becomes a non-personal part of a non-personal organism, groping after biological preservation in futile effort. Virtue becomes mere expediency and our theory of the world must be pessimistic.

The individual and society cannot thus be merged without violence to self-consciousness, or surrender of the only logical meaning of pleasure. 'The threads of which our life is

<sup>1</sup> Romanes Lecture, *Evolution and Ethics*.

<sup>2</sup> *Science of Ethics*, p. 430.

woven are threads of feeling, if the texture of the web is reason's work. The hedonist unweaves the web of life into its threads, and having unwoven it cannot recover the lost design.'<sup>1</sup>

The chief good cannot be pleasure. Pleasure is a natural instinct, but it is the test of character to resist its fascinations, and to be ruled by higher considerations. The enigma of experience is the suffering of those whose virtue and goodness we approve. It is the topic of the book of Job, and the keynote of the Psalms. It finds its historical climax in the cross of Jesus Christ. We cannot solve the mystery by surrender to the merely material conditions of life and prudential adaptation to environment.

'We must indeed believe that the goal of moral progress is the complete coincidence of goodness with happiness. But at present it is not so, and the lesson of the best lives is that the way to that goal lies through suffering. Perhaps we cannot understand the full significance of pain in relation to goodness; but its presence in all noble lives tell us of a higher end than pleasure, of an end in which pleasure may be taken up as an element, but which itself is infinitely more; of an end, faithfulness to which must often mean indifference to pain

<sup>1</sup> Seth, *op. cit.* p. 149.

or better than indifference, a noble willingness to bear it for the sake of a higher good which may not otherwise be reached, for the sake of that highest life which is not possible save through the death of all that is lower than itself.'<sup>1</sup>

2. *The summum bonum or highest good cannot be disregarded in favour of a merely formal standard.* By this we mean that it has been characteristic of certain schools of undoubted excellence in many ways, and particularly in the preservation of features which they have over-emphasized, that they have found the end of morality almost if not entirely in the inward essential feature of moral obligation. Realizing very clearly that the requirement of moral obligation is distinct from all other obligation in quality, and that it requires the subjection of lower instincts and desires, such schools have tended towards an abstraction of that element and the elevation of it to be the sole arbiter of conduct. We find it in various forms in the Cynic precursors of the Stoics, in the Stoics themselves, in Christian asceticism, and in intuitionists, in Kant, and even idealists.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> James Seth, *op. cit.* pp. 150-1.

<sup>2</sup> The following give fuller treatment of formalistic theories: Muirhead, *Elements of Ethics*, Book III. Chap. II.; Mackenzie, *Manual of Ethics*, Book II. Chap. III.; Abbot,



It may vary in particular shade of teaching, and appear as self-conquest, rigorism, asceticism, or formalism.<sup>1</sup> Whether it is self-denial for self-denial's sake, or 'duty for duty's sake' (Bradley), personal feeling, or the categorical imperative obeyed for its own sake, any tendency to ignore the question of the objective nature or content of the good as the end of conduct makes a fatal omission.

The abstraction of the rational element of the moral problem began in *Cynicism*. In self-control and insensibility the cynics found the secret of well-being. Their extravagances and pride are associated with the name of Diogenes. Whatever may have been the excellences of their teaching, the more systematic and lofty conceptions of Stoicism have quite overshadowed them.

According to *Stoicism*, 'life according to nature' means rational nature. The harmony they sought was not that of any actual state, but of the ideal within. Of the Stoics founded

*Kant's Theory of Ethics*; Farrar, *Seekers after God*; D'Arcy, *Short Studies of Ethics*; James Seth, *A Study of Ethical Principles*, Part I. Chap. II.; Edward Caird, *The Philosophy of Kant*, Vol. II. Chaps. I. and II.; Martineau, *Types of Ethical Theory*; Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, Essays III. and IV.

<sup>1</sup> Formalism means giving prominence to the *form* of moral constraint, apart from the *content* of positive teaching as to the nature of the good and the right.



by Zeno the Romans Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus are representative.<sup>1</sup> As an expression of the truth that goodness is not in mere sensibility, and that the natural impulses must be controlled, they are thoroughly Christian in temper, and unduly influenced the Christian estimate of character. 'Seneca saepe noster' ('Seneca often our own') has been repeated many a time since Tertullian used the phrase. In the cosmopolitan ideal they approach the Christian thought of the 'kingdom of heaven.' Their subordination of individual pleasure to larger issues provokes perpetual admiration. 'Whatever is agreeable to you, O Universe, is so to me too.'<sup>2</sup> But by reason of the lack of adequate direction to this self-suppression the Stoic ceased to be a living type. In proud self-sufficiency of inward superiority to actual circumstances, Stoicism became supremely individualistic rather than social. Its ideal was cold and unhuman. There was no living relationship to meet the personal supremacy over impulse. Impersonal force can never be the satisfying correlative of a personal spirit in its endeavour after goodness. It was destructive of

<sup>1</sup> See Farrar, *Seekers after God*, and translations and selections published by Walter Scott.

<sup>2</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, IV. 25.

the natural rather than redemptive. Like the statue of Pygmalion, for all its beauty it lacked life. What matter that the face be still if it be the face of death, and the fountain of joy be frozen.

Thus Stoicism lacked' elasticity, adaptiveness, and the power to assimilate, which Christianity possessed. It had no vision of actual concrete achievement in the world. It had no Fatherhood of God ; no brotherhood of man. Hence it was pessimistic rather than optimistic. Its lack of objective meaning for the *summum bonum* destroyed hope, and made suicide allowable and even commendable ; while Christianity, with its historic basis and millennium, appealed to the heart of the multitude and throbbed with moral energy.

*Christian asceticism* has often by its unpractical onesideness been merely formal in its idea of the *summum bonum*. The Cross has been dissociated from its purpose ; the inwardness has been shut up to itself ; the 'crucifixion of self' has been rather the end than the means of Christian character. In the hermit and anchorite of the sort of Simeon Stylites, there has even been more of the Cynic than the Stoic. The virtue of humility destroyed by its debasement from its true character, that respect for the body which is an integral part of Christian teaching.

The same imperfection meets us in the teaching of *Kant*. Free from all crudity of thought as to the separation of the rational self from the actual sensibility of experience, Kant regarded the elimination of all material considerations as essential to moral goodness. The imperative of any actual end sought was termed by him 'hypothetical'; the imperative of moral obligation 'categorical' and unconditional.<sup>1</sup> 'For in order that an action should be morally good, it is not enough that it conform to the moral law, but it must also be done *for the sake of the law*; otherwise that conformity is only very contingent and uncertain.'<sup>2</sup> Again, 'Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good without qualification, except a good will.'<sup>3</sup> It is a 'jewel which shines in its own light.' By this elimination of external ends Kant sought a universal rule. 'Act only on that maxim or principle which thou canst at the same time will to become a universal law.'<sup>4</sup>

This stringency and elimination of feeling overleaps itself in the endeavour to attain a supreme principle. A man who does so-called duty in a cold, mechanical fashion, ceases to

<sup>1</sup> *Metaphysics of Morals*, § 38,

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Preface.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* § 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* § 47.

have the living sympathy which makes benevolence real, and even demoralizes acts so done. The principle admits of no estimate of the complications of life. Rules created upon such a principle sooner or later clash in particular cases. Laws are made for men ; they are subject to constant modification, and the true interests of life cannot therefore be sacrificed to the abstract principle of law. It was the essence of Pharisaism, to observe law for law's sake and it was to break through trammels of such dead formality Jesus Christ came into conflict with the Pharisee and scribe. The formality of philosophical abstraction, and the formality of literal external obedience, are far asunder ; yet in practical application these extremes meet. Kant progressed beyond the bareness of his categorical imperative so far as to give the rule, 'So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as a means only.'<sup>1</sup> This conception of all rational beings as constitutive of a kingdom of ends passes beyond the idea of mere formal consistency, and gives a less ghost-like character to his notion of perfection ; but into a thorough criticism of Kant's theory of *summum bonum* and his ethical

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit. § 57.

system generally we cannot go.<sup>1</sup> His emphasis of the peculiar quality of moral obligation and critical examination of the distinction between natural and moral necessity is of inestimable importance, and has been the basis of modern idealism.

*Intuitionism.*—Intuitionism is the historic antagonist of Utilitarianism. Against the egoism of Hobbes the vindication of conscience was found in the inborn capacity of moral judgement apart from the relation of actions to any end outside themselves. The term may be used in a narrower or wider sense, but it stands for a very distinct type of ethical theory. It is really a theory of conscience rather than of the ultimate end of action; but since it has sometimes been regarded as sufficient for the greater problem, it must be dealt with in this connexion.

Bishop Butler may be taken as an illustration. In his *Sermons on Human Nature* he seeks to show that natural unregulated egoism is a chimæra; that every impulse has its legitimate sphere; and that the regulative principles are self-love and conscience.

‘Every bias, instinct, propension within is a real part of our nature, but not the whole. Add to these the superior faculty whose office it is

<sup>1</sup> See works mentioned at the beginning of this section.

to adjust, manage, and preside over them, and take in this its natural superiority, and you complete the idea of human nature.'<sup>1</sup> But this authority of conscience, which 'had it strength as it has right, had it power as it has manifest authority, would absolutely govern the world,'<sup>2</sup> is not adequate of itself to direct itself. Bishop Butler's moral philosophy is only adequately represented in conjunction with the Christian content of morality which he held. Apart from that it might be liable to the charge of 'formalism.'

The same applies to the intuitionism of Dr. James Martineau. His criticism of schemes which do violence to the essential quality of ethical obligation is an invaluable service to morals and religion. His analysis of the psychology of ethics is the positive counterpart of that criticism. But for the theism which was associated with his intuitionism it might deserve the criticism of Professor Sidgwick. Referring to Martineau's comparison and valuation of motives, he says,<sup>3</sup> the comparison ultimately decisive 'is not between lower motives primarily conflicting, but between the effects of the different lines of conduct to which these motives respectively prompt, considered in

<sup>1</sup> Sermon III.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon II.

<sup>3</sup> *Method of Ethics*, Book. III, Chap, XII, 3.

relation to whatever we regard as the ultimate end or ends of reasonable achievement.' Also elsewhere he says the judgement of the relative worth of natural tendencies, 'is based on a comparison of their objects with what for the time being is taken as the supreme ideal of life as a whole.' And he maintains that this supreme ideal of life rises from age to age according to the conditions of increasing knowledge and enlarged social experience.

But the possibility of theistic idealism is immediately apparent if intuitionism be limited to a theory of conscience, and certainly, on a broader basis of the historic revelation of God in Jesus Christ, that increasing knowledge and enlarged social experience of which Sidgwick speaks has actual illumination and direction.

This charge of formalism or one-sidedness in solving the problem of the chief good can be brought with greater justification against modern ethical societies.<sup>1</sup> They seek a basis of union between those who hold all shades of theological and non-theological opinion in purely ethical endeavour. So far as the practical reforms of the age are concerned there may be particular instances where co-operation is possible and

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Ethics and Religion*, Sonnenschein (Society of Ethical Propagandists).



valuable ; but as a theoretical basis of union it is entirely nebulous and uncertain. The goal being various or ignored, the steering of the course must soon be a matter of divergence. We cannot obliterate our objective views of the highest good. Theist and secularist have uncertain and limited unanimity. Each has his own conception of what is the content of the good.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE HIGHEST GOOD<sup>1</sup>

THE theories considered have on both sides, the hedonistic and formal, shown a tendency to approximate, as a result of gradual evolution of thought. In some of the cases criticized as formal they have, as for example Bishop Butler and Dr. Martineau, in practical application been in harmony with Christian teaching. The cause of imperfections in the contrasted methods of dealing with the moral problem lies in certain antitheses or dualisms. These are the contrast *first* between the natural and moral order, and *second* between the claims of the individual and the community.

Both these dualisms are transcended and reconciled in the idea of the kingdom of God as the *summum bonum*.

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Martensen, op. cit. I. §§ 45-70; Dorner, op. cit. pp. 283-98; Seth, op. cit. Chap. III.; Wendt, *Teaching of Jesus*, Vol. II. § III.; Newman Smyth, II. i.

We welcome and appreciate every development towards the Christian comprehensive idea. The progress of human thought and the deeper understanding of the Christian revelation continue side by side ; but the Christian revelation maintains its position as containing the norm or standard, and as directing the line of man's moral progress in the most advanced and vigorous nations of the world ; and the nature of its moral theory has saved it as a system from some of the fatal defects that have attended less adequate conceptions of the moral life. Thus, it has been saved from the divorce between actual and ideal theories so manifest in Platonism, and the highest conceptions of Aristotle, by reason of its historic and actual basis. Greek philosophy has affected Christian thought ; but the radical contrast is in the historic concrete facts associated with Christian teaching. Its history and teaching are fused.

Christian ethics has been saved from the paralysing self-destructive theory of pantheism by its fidelity to the essential features of moral consciousness. The energy and enterprise which mark western civilization and contrasts with eastern fatalism is in part the outcome of the Christian conviction of individual responsibility and free will. At the same time, Christian ethics

has been saved from the proud and sterile individualism of the Stoic sage by its teaching of an actual kingdom of God, in which the individual is enrolled and which he is engaged to serve. It has been saved from disregard of the individual and consequent demoralization associated with naturalistic socialism by the principle of voluntary self-surrender and the lofty and spiritual end for which such self-surrender is made. It has been saved from violence on the one hand and despair on the other by reason of its progressive optimism.<sup>1</sup>

Its foundation is in vital principles rather than precepts and rules, and thus it is perennial in its message to the moral needs of men.

Because thus the Christian system rests on the larger logic of life rather than the theoretic consistencies of philosophic constructions, it survives the centuries and permeates the thoughts of men. It is consistent with every philosophic interest, and harmonizes the paralogsms of philosophy where they stand in hopeless antithesis. *Naturalism, and rationalism in morals, egoism and altruism are brought into harmony in the Christian ideas of blessedness and the kingdom of God.* The conflicting elements are harmonized neither by the suppression

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Martensen, §§ 51-8.

of any, nor the forced introduction of incongruous ideas. The secret of adjustment and interpretation is found in the unifying conception of the kingdom of God as the highest good.

1. *Jesus Christ taught the existence of such a supreme object of desire.* The parables of the hid treasure and the pearl of great price (Matt. xiii.) are unmistakable on this point. The kingdom of heaven is that for which the finder sells all that he has to secure the possession. This representation, is supplemented by the all-pervasive character of the kingdom. It is 'like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened.'

This supreme and comprehensive character, of the kingdom of God is identical in teaching with the claims of Christ Himself to utmost surrender and devotion. As He gradually revealed the relation of Himself to the kingdom, He set forth the alternative of choice in such personal terms. 'He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. . . . He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it' (Matt x. 37, 39 : cp. xvi. 24-8 ; Mark viii. 34-8 ; Luke ix. 23-7). A due calculation of the cost of acceptance or rejection is the basis of life's probation (Luke xiv. 26-33).

2. *From the individual standpoint the summum bonum, or chief good, is set forth as blessedness.* This individual aspect is first, though preliminary. The terms used for personal well-being are neither limited to material good nor abstract ideal perfection. From the unsystematic and popular form in which the teaching of Jesus Christ was given, we are able to advance to a systematization by taking each phase of the ethical problem. The first paradox is between the abstract rational conception of the good and the natural and material good. They can neither be ignored nor left in isolation. Closely associated therewith is the relation of the individual to the community. In systems which have attempted the reconciliation there is much that approaches the Christian idea of blessedness.

Plato's idealism led him to postulate a hierarchy of ideas, of which the idea of the 'good' is supreme, and rules the intelligible world of reason, and he found the *summum bonum* not in pleasure nor knowledge only, but the greatest possible likeness to God as the absolute good. But to understand this good was only possible to philosophers, and he taught another lower form of virtue, as appropriate for a good citizen. To the analysis of this he devoted his chief

ethical treatise, *The Republic*. The title is indicative of the general subordination of the idea of individual well-being to that of the community. Aristotle still more devoted his attention to the practical civic virtues that loomed so large in the thought of Greek ethics, though like Plato he recognized the contemplative life of the philosopher as the highest type of life.

Thus the opposition of the ideal and natural life, the community and individual, was not really harmonized, and the divergence was still more clearly seen in the development of the Stoic ideal.<sup>1</sup> 'It was only with the advent of Christianity that it again became possible to conceive of an ideal kingdom, of which all are members, and in which even the humblest citizen may participate by faith, though unable to understand the nature of the unity within which his life is passed.'<sup>2</sup>

It is that participation in which the 'blessedness' of the individual consists. 'The kingdom

<sup>1</sup> Concerning individualism and socialism cp. Martensen, §§ 63-70.

<sup>2</sup> Mackenzie's *Manual of Ethics*, p. 153: respecting the ethics of Plato and Aristotle see Sidgwick's *History*; also *Histories of Philosophy*—e.g. Schwegeler, Ueberweg, Erdmann, or Zeller.

of God is within you' (Luke xvii. 21). In the delineation of that blessedness or perfect self-realization, the contrast and opposition of the two aspects of life is first of all recognized in its full intensity. 'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon' (Matt. vi. 24). The parable of the rich fool (Luke xii. 16) is expressly given to illustrate the truth, 'A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.'

In harmony with this is the contrast in the Johannine teaching, between 'the world' and 'eternal life.' 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For . . . the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever' (1 John ii. 15-7).

So far as the quality of life is thereby signified it is the experience of unclouded blessedness, in comparison with which the privations and sufferings of this world are but as a shadow. Identification with that kingdom now already produces that blessedness by anticipation, and rest and solace are acquired even in the hard and troubled lot (Luke x. 21; Matt. xi. 28, 30; Mark viii. 35: cp. Matt. x. 39; John iii. 15 ff., iv. 14, v. 24-6, x. 28, xvii. 2).

'This is life eternal, that they should know thee,



the only true God, and Him whom Thou didst send even Jesus Christ (John xvii. 3) ' ; so that the apprehension of life as the abiding end of all things is the truly beatific state of every man. Thus, too, St. Paul bids the rich to subordinate their material possessions to higher than selfish uses, 'that they may lay hold on the life which is life indeed' (1 Tim. vi. 19).

So far is Christianity from any paralysing fatalism in this personal identification with the wider universe of eternal life, that it is only in active and progressive personal realization of such life that blessedness consists. It is not in mystic pantheistic reverie that the world and life are truly regarded *sub specie aeternitatis*, but by active co-operation in achievement of that order in the world, the ultimate and eternal triumph of which is assured. It is assured by the supremacy of God as the absolute and eternal good in contrast to the transient phenomena of evil. Identification with the kingdom of God is this eternal life of blessedness in the individual.

It is because of this fundamental principle of the subordination of the material to the spiritual that the beatitudes (Matt. v.) emphasize the inward condition, as opposed to material good, as the primary qualification for participation in that kingdom. The poor in spirit, they that



mourn, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, represent those who attain such subordination. To 'seek first the kingdom of heaven' (cp. Luke xii. 31-3) makes unmistakable that the reconciliation of the rational and material good is by elevation of the material. But on the other hand, it is by elevation, not destruction, of the natural element of life. The mould of natural pleasure is broken up; but the elements of natural well-being are neither destroyed nor despised. While seeking first the kingdom of heaven, 'all these things shall be added' (Matt. vi. 33). The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Rom. xiv. 17); yet the Son of man came eating and drinking, and the consummation of the kingdom is set forth as a feast, and includes the banishment of sorrow and mourning and pain (Rev. xxi. 4).

In the meantime, 'if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new' (2 Cor. v. 17). By that regeneration the material concerns of life find a new value, and the natural impulses a new place in the discipline of life. This is the true autonomy of the moral life. Feelings do not control themselves. They recognize no higher and lower. It is the rational

activity of self, under the direction of an ideal, whereby the raw material of feeling and impulse is used, that makes true ethical life. The lower self is not annihilated, but harmonized and co-ordinated in the second or new nature of positive rather than restrictive effort. Permanent and universal satisfaction takes the place of transient and mere selfish pleasure.

The bearing of this conception of blessedness on the future rewards and punishments in the New Testament belongs to the ethics of the last things ; but at this point it is the present inward condition of actual accommodation of the individual life to the order of the kingdom of God. In that is the highest satisfaction of our nature. It includes all that the Stoic sage desired, saturated with the elements of joy and hope for which Stoicism made no adequate provision. So—

That more and more a Providence  
Of love is understood,  
Making the springs of time and sense  
Sweet with eternal good.<sup>1</sup>

There is a synthesis of sentient and rational good in the appropriation of a non-selfish supernatural end. It is the highest realization of the individual self.

<sup>1</sup> Whittier, *My Psalm*.

How this attitude is attained, and its bearing on other aspects of the Christian ethical standard, will be seen.

How this idea of blessedness was evolved from the providential morality of Judaism, and its connexion with prevailing ideas in the time of Jesus, are questions of historical theology<sup>1</sup>; but it holds crystallized in itself the most comprehensive elements of the highest good applied to individual necessity.

3. *The social aspect of the summum bonum is the kingdom of God.* We have seen that there is no obscuring of the individual in the ethical scheme of the New Testament. The merely scientifically imagined community cannot do justice to the individual. Man must not be mechanically sacrificed to society. It is only by fidelity to legitimate claims of man as a spiritual being and primary unit, that any idea of the social unity can be maintained.

But the idea of the kingdom of God not *merely* taught that the poorest and lowliest is the object of solicitude, and the centre of privilege and responsibility; but that the providence of God includes all (Matt. v. 43-8, vi. 26, 30). There is always prominent as the explanation of the full worth of the individual the corporate value and

<sup>1</sup> Vide Wendt, *Teaching of Jesus*, § 1.

destiny of mankind. The worth of the race is realized in the consummation of the kingdom of heaven. It is only within that kingdom, and by the recognition of its social relations, that the individual can attain to his own blessedness.

The idea of organic unity and of the social organism has partly its affinity with biological research; but it is historically inaccurate to attribute its ethical value to such an origin. The principles which have become the common possession of mankind from the teaching of Jesus have germinated in the minds and institutions of the civilized world. They have received corroboration in the scientific development of evolutionary research, and now they are reacting upon the mind and heart of Christendom for a fuller realization of hopes and aspirations originating and fostered by their influence. If the 'tribal self' thus come to consciousness is to realize a true ideal, we look to those whose heritage is the loftiest conception of the community and the race ever revealed, to take their part in furthering the efforts of their generation in that direction. Socialism, to be christianized, must be saved from short-sightedness and narrow class interpretations. It must find its sanctions in the highest authority and its highest end. It must

find its strength and safety, in the recognition of these.

Such is the vision of the kingdom of God. The interests of each are safe-guarded, as contributing in their own way to the welfare of all, and as only achieved thereby. The kingdom, viewed in the light of the mutual relation of its members, is a brotherhood, a family, in which none is forgotten or ignored; viewed in the light of its highest good it is the entire perfection of the whole—a hierarchy, as it were, of interests in subordination and focal unity by the sovereignty of the good in the person of God.

Kant's theory of humanity as a kingdom of ends, and the Comtist theory of humanity, are so far correct and in harmony with the teaching of the New Testament. But if 'humanity' is to find an optimistic meaning, if its progress is to be energized and directed, its sufficiency is not in itself.<sup>1</sup> Humanity is idealized only through Christ.<sup>2</sup>

In the kingdom of God these needs are met. Individual surrender, that regenerates individuality and purges away its anti-social temper, is the condition of entrance. Love is the common

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Martensen, *op. cit.*, 'Optimism and Pessimism,' §§ 51-8.

<sup>2</sup> Vide Seeley, *Ecce Homo*.

obligation that levels every barrier between man and man, race and race. Forgiveness is the condition of its franchise (Matt. v. 24, vi. 14, xviii. 21 : cp. Col. iii. 13). By the parable of the prodigal (Luke xv.) and of the good Samaritan (Luke x. 33), by denying the prerogatives of mere genealogical descent (John viii. 39-44), by instituting a new kinship, founded upon loyalty to the will of God (Matt. xii. 46 ff. ; Mark iii. 31 ff.), by the representation of the inclusive character of the company of those who should attain the privileges of the consummation of the kingdom (Matt. viii. 11 ; Luke xiii. 29), by emphasizing personal qualifications of character (Matt. xxii. 11-2), Jesus Christ crossed the current national anticipations of His time and founded a cosmopolitan—or, better, philanthropic—and social ideal of brotherhood, the progressive results of which are revealed and yet further to be revealed in the history of the world. Only as man is 'being renewed unto knowledge after the image of Him that created him' (Col. iii. 10) can the obliteration of racial and social antagonisms be brought about. It was in perfect accord with this that St. Paul reminded the Philippians, 'our citizenship is in heaven' (Phil. iii. 20), and that the Church became a definite organization for the achievement of

that progressive reformation of the social life of the world.

To discuss the place of the Church in the historic fulfilment of that purpose would require an exhaustive survey of history. There is without doubt a divergence, a distinction, and sometimes conflict, between the Church and the kingdom of God. The ideal has sometimes been sacrificed to the material ends of ecclesiastical aspiration. The kingdom of God is wider than the Church. We fear it has sometimes been resisted by the official direction of the Church. Nevertheless, its existence is witness not merely to the design of the Founder of the Christian religion, but to the actual and practical character of its teaching. If the vision of the city of God be a dream, it is one the realization of which has been vividly anticipated and passionately striven for by those who regard it as the will of the Creator and Ruler of men. While Jesus Christ distinctly repudiated a national or political kingdom, based upon secular considerations, sustained by worldly methods, and directed by earthly aim, He did not teach a kingdom out of all touch with existing affairs of men. Not only did He repudiate outward pomp (John vi. 15, Luke xvii. 20 ff.), and warn His disciples against the leaven of Pharisee and Herodian (Mark viii. 15), but equally did



He avoid the notion of a remote and separate heavenly state. The kingdom was come (Mark i. 15; Luke x. 9); by the power of God casting out devils He demonstrated its presence (Luke xi. 20). Blessing beyond that granted to prophets and righteous men was granted to those who saw His day (Luke x. 23 ff.). Small as a mustard seed, it was already planted in the soil of earthly affairs (Luke xiii. 18-21 : cp. Matt. xiii).

It is this ethical kingdom amid earthly kingdoms (*imperium in imperio*) with which we have to do. Its apocalyptic glory is the promised consummation which is the final goal of Christian endeavour. But meantime it is here and in our midst :

Blessing the cotter and the crown,  
Sweetening worn Labour's bitter cup,  
And plucking not the highest down,  
Lifting the lowest up.<sup>1</sup>

And it is an ideal for the race in which not merely all narrow and partisan limitations of states and social schemes are exceeded. It is also one in which material and moral well-being of society are duly combined.

The realization of the moral ideal of the individual has been placed in the forefront. Fidelity to it at all cost, in conflict with the

<sup>1</sup> Whittier, *To the Reformers of England*.



prevailing temper of any antagonistic standard, is the condition. The cross is its symbol. 'No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God' (Luke ix. 62). Self-denial in relation to material advantage must run all hazards (Matt. x. 38, xvi. 24: cp. Luke ix. 23, &c.). So far from personal well-being affording the aim, the limb and life, the eye or hand, must go rather than the kingdom of heaven be lost (Matt. xviii. 9; Mark ix. 47). The eye must be single (Luke xi. 34) if the vision is to be clear.

In this way the strong foundation of resistance of natural impulse and desire is demonstrated as the basis of character. But it is no 'parasitic virtue' or end in itself. The kingdom of God means the synthesis of moral and natural welfare of the community, and it is for this personal sacrifice is also made.

Practical philanthropy is a prominent feature of Christianity (Matt. vi. 1, xxv. 33 ff.; Mark i. 34; Luke xi. 41; John xii. 8; Acts x. 2, xxiv. 17; James i. 27, &c.). But to interpret Christian teaching with regard to the material well-being of the community as in sum and substance indiscriminate 'charity' is, to say the least, a superficial understanding.

The basal ideas are such as to affect all social

relations and transform social institutions. As members of the kingdom every individual is pledged to so act as to assimilate the existing order of the family industry, society, and state to the order of which the root principles are found in the kingdom of God. The well-being of the community as included in the kingdom of God as the *summum bonum*, is no mere sentimental or intellectual dream, but such a social and material condition as shall be both the suitable environment and expression of the highest social experience. The teaching of the New Testament attacks every vice and crime that tends to the enfeeblement of the individual body; every wrong and injustice that impoverishes the opportunity of others, and by the principle of brotherhood, condemns every practice and custom that does not tend to the utmost good of all. 'He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen' (1 John iv. 22: cp. Epistle to Philemon).

4. *It is as emphatically the kingdom of God.* Ethics on the highest plane, and religion, cannot be divorced. On the lower plane of the external enforcement of rules and conventions temporary independence may be assumed. But as the recognition of a Personal God is a necessary

postulate of truest ethical life, so the *summum bonum* is represented in the New Testament as coincident with comprehensive and adequate relations between man as a moral agent and God. What those comprehensive and adequate relations are Jesus Christ set forth in sublime simplicity of Fatherhood.

The application of that conception to the ethical necessity of mankind is the whole business of the Christian religion, theological and practical. The historical associations of that conception, and a vindication of its unique character, is the part of apologetics. Its ethical import is primarily this: the earliest form of educative authority and control is the imperfect form of the beneficent dominion of perfect goodness. The theocratic race of Israel is superseded by the ethical society of the children of God. All idea of mere despotic power is eliminated. Religion is completely ethicized. Human society is not a chaos of personal atoms, but by direct personal relation to the Father of Spirit order is created in the mutual dependence and relationship of men. God as absolute goodness is neither in transcendent isolation and indifference, nor in immanence, absorbing and obliterating the individual and personal features of life; but in such direct and universal

relations to men as tend to create a sense of corporate capacity and responsibility.

Further, in this conception of God as Father we have the first phase of that redemptive view of natural life. No manicheism or thought of equal opposing evil is tolerable. The supremacy of the good is the secret of Christian optimism. The Father is Lord of heaven and earth (Matt. xi. 25). With Him all things are possible (Mark x. 27). He governs the destinies of the world (Mark xiii. 32) and human life (Luke xii. 20). He is full of creative power (Mark xii. 24) and providential care (Matt. v. 45, vi. 32). In a word, God is love, and evil only part of a disciplinary process, that the works of God may be manifested (John ix. 3).

In the full apprehension of what that means arises that type of character in which are harmonized all man's functions and social relations. In the perfectness of the Father's goodness is the security and reflection of man's. 'Ye therefore shall be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect' (Matt. v. 48). 'That is, perfection of man according to his type, in conformity to the highest idea of his being, for his original and archetypal being is divine; and such fulfilment of the true type of humanity is the broadest and most comprehensive idea

of the good which any scientific generalization can compass.’<sup>1</sup>

In no place is this ethical idea of the Father more clearly taught than in the fourth gospel (v. 26, xv. 16, xvi. 23-6). The idea of opposition and separation from the physical world is quite bridged over. It is the activity of the Father that explains the peremptory claim of all suffering upon the pity of Christ Himself: ‘My Father worketh hitherto and I work’ (v. 17-43). In St. Paul the contrast was felt between the old legalism and the new relation of ‘adoption’ (Gal. iii. 23—iv. 7, v. 1; Rom. viii. 14-16). The spirit that can cry ‘Abba, Father’ has attained to the true relation upon which the realization of man’s highest good depends.

The purpose of the foregoing two chapters has been to show how Christian ethics is the practical expression of that reconciliation between the conflicting elements of moral and natural life which is the despair of philosophy. It is an attempt to show how Christianity tenaciously maintains the optimistic effort of the higher principles of human character and conduct, as opposed to the surrender to the merely material or cosmic order on the one

<sup>1</sup> Newman Smyth, p. 109.

hand, or the unrelated abstraction of the ideal rational order on the other. We believe both diverging alternatives lead to the same disappointing issue. It is only by asserting their ultimate harmony, and by due subordination without destruction of the 'natural,' that human effort be preserved in happy and healthy equilibrium.

It is thus that the Christian *summum bonum* enkindles the energy and inspires the hopes of those individuals and nations that come in any measure under its dominating influence. In contrast with that may be quoted Huxley's verdict of merely rational or speculative theory. 'Greek thought and Indian thought set out from common ground to both, diverge widely, develop under very different physical and moral conditions, and finally converge to practically the same end.

The *Vedas* and Homeric epos set before us a world of rich and vigorous life full of joyous fighting men,

That ever with a frolic welcome took  
The thunder and the sunshine,

and who were ready to brave the very gods themselves when their blood was up. A few centuries pass away, and under the influence of

civilization the descendants of these men are "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought"—frank pessimists, or at best make-believe optimists. . . . The hero has become a monk, the man of action is replaced by the quietist, whose highest aspiration is to be the passive instrument of divine Reason. By the Tiber as by the Ganges, ethical man admits the cosmos is too strong for him; and, destroying every bond which ties him to it by ascetic discipline, he seeks salvation in absolute renunciation.'<sup>1</sup>

Christian ethics avoids the Scylla and Charybdis of moral life in actual practice. It has inspired the unconquerable tenacity of hope with which its followers triumph over the mere cosmic order. The history of the world and every Christian life bear witness.

<sup>1</sup> *Evolution and Ethics*, p. 77.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *THE CHRISTIAN IDEAL; THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST<sup>1</sup>*

1. *THE meaning of the example of Christ as ideal.* The discussion of the question of the *summum bonum* is not the final inquiry of ethics. When the ultimate goal of human conduct is acknowledged, when the interests of social and individual well-being, of material and spiritual good, have been focussed as it were, or harmonized, there still remains the task of attainment. Even before that can be successfully considered as a problem of ethical dynamics the standard of conduct must be defined. How is the obligation to seek the highest good to be interpreted back again into terms of particular deeds or classes of actions; or how are we to describe the inward conditions of individual life from which deeds emanate, and by which character is formed?

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Martensen, §§ 71-4; Newman Smyth, Part I. Chap. I.-III.; Dorner, pp. 343-63.



From a chaos of educational precepts and customs the rational inquirer seeks a vindication and criterion of those which he will be justified in obeying, and that is the problem of the *summum bonum*. But apart from the search for the absolute good, a standard of conduct is required by which, directly and immediately, acts may be measured. There is needed some map of the route as well as a goal. The need of the moralist is to afford general directions for conduct, as well as to define its end. Society, of which every man forms part, and without which he has no ethical value, is a complicated machine. It is by the adjustment of the parts in the whole that the fabric is maintained. The health of the organism is dependent on the health of the tissue, and therefore some ideal or standard of moral health is needed which will cover the variations of individual duty.

Every ideal may be expressed for application to persons and occasions more or less adequately in the form of rules. But the ideal is an intermediate conception between the *summum bonum* and particular rules. In popular use the word ideal often means imaginary :

The light that never was on sea or land,  
The consecration and the poet's dream.

But as used here it is not visionary. It is

the measure of conduct as in conformity with the realization of the end desired. It is the normal standard or test of actions, and character as character. There are many roads to the goal, as there are many lives in the realization of the chief end. All conduct is in relation to organized society, and the individual standpoint varies indefinitely. It is customary to speak in logic and psychology of the 'universe,' to which ideas have to be referred, and in connexion with which alone they can be correctly interpreted. The same phenomenon in the realm of different sciences may have a different import. So the same event may have a different bearing upon different persons ; master and servant, father and king, have their relative duties. Again, our own attitude may vary as years and circumstances alter. All this illustrates how there are 'universes of desire' as well as thought ; and in the same individual the same event may be referred to one or another of these. The organized institutions of men in politics, religion, and social distinction are the outward expression of these variable and limited interpretations of that which is desirable. They are often in direct antagonism.

But these partial ideals are not essentially and irreconcilably in conflict. They may be

representative of acknowledged interests of truth and goodness, and though over-zealous champions may exaggerate them, and honest error of judgement may affect our interpretation of right and duty, it is the conviction that there need not be disorganization nor indifference as to what is right, which inspires our search for some harmonizing standard. What we seek, therefore, is some statement of practical principles which may apply to each and all men for the stability and development of society in the direction of the acknowledged end. The end we have seen is the kingdom of God and blessedness for the individual. The universal standard is the example of Jesus Christ. In that we find a clue to the ultimate harmony of every life in the perfect scheme or plan. Men's lives are not ruled by constant reference to an ultimate and universal end. It is too remote and unwieldy a method. Economy in all human purposes is secured by the formulation of proximate ends. So secondary principles are indispensable. Every nation has its code, its social conventions. Every voluntary association has its rules, and from the school boy to the professional classes and social circles we have unwritten standards of 'good form,' honour, and etiquette.

When it is asked, what is the provision of

Christian ethics for the practical guidance of men, in face of these various aspects and theories of right? with what does it confront the existing standards of men? what may safely be adopted as a universally adaptable norm of human conduct?—the answer is the example of Jesus Christ.

A further illustration of the necessity referred to may be found in Leslie Stephen's description of 'types.'<sup>1</sup> 'Just as a typical bow may represent the maximum efficiency for its particular purpose of shooting arrows, so the "typical" man is the man best adapted for the particular place in the social organism which he may have to fill . . . the process of evolution is always working out a problem which implies the attainment of general efficiency by the acquisition of certain general qualities.'<sup>2</sup>

What by retrospective analysis evolutionists discover as the typical man Christianity declares as the assured result of historic guidance afforded by the ideal type of perfect manhood in Christ Jesus; only it is a progressive principle, not a retrospective discovery. The tendency of evolution as a moral guide is to idealize 'the respectable,' rather than command respect for

<sup>1</sup> *Science of Ethics*, Chap. II. § 4: cp. Chap. X. § 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 81.

an ideal. The Church's ideal is comprehensive of the whole sphere of man's well-being, and is not destructive of the unit of the individual. Man's ethical development is not to be secured by non-personal measurement of men, whereby they become mere blocks or bricks that will fit into a social fabric. Nor can men be treated as tissue in a non-personal organism, nor as mere bees in a hive. It is against all degradation of the personal element Christianity constantly insists, and exhorts that man as man should strive after the ideal of manhood, whatever particular interests of society he may represent ; lest born a man he die a doctor, grocer, soldier, or mere social cipher of any kind.

Too often this standard of the example of Christ has been taken with a shallow and narrow meaning ; still more often, by reason of the weakness of human nature, it has been inconsistently adopted. Man's thought and action are subject to all kinds of fallibility and shortcoming in all realms of human effort, besides the distinctly moral endeavour. But in the example of Jesus Christ as standard we have a unifying point of reference which is the marvel of history in its infinite capacity and range. It has been adopted by child and sage, peasant and prince.

It is the proper business of the Church to exemplify and explain its constantly fresh meaning in the light of present demands upon men. However imperfectly that duty is discharged, we claim that the standard it sets up in Jesus Christ has been the guidance of moral progress.

It is acknowledged by those who resent the theological basis which we regard as indispensable, 'The Christian Church has been for nearly two thousand years the greatest ethical society in the world.'<sup>1</sup> 'Such movements,' as mere ethical societies, 'can scarcely prosper except where Christianity has prepared the way; such things only grow out of a soil which has been formed by centuries of Christian tillage.'<sup>2</sup> The place of the Church in the Christian scheme is, however, not at present before us. The point is, that its position is unique in the possession of this specific feature of its moral system—the meaning of the example of Christ, and the constant need of its interpretation and application.

It is not an haphazard and irrational standard. It is not possible as a stereotyped repetition of deeds which have lost their exact historic setting. But it is a progressive harmonious ideal of infinite and universal capacity for men. The constant inquiry, 'If Christ came to——?' must

<sup>1</sup> J. R. Seeley, *Ethics and Religion*, p. 19.      <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

not be allowed to mislead ; neither do we think it is really intended to mislead. It is a vivid phrase to express the application of the Christ ideal to some particular modern instance of sharp contrast. Just so the 'Imitatio Christi' is a beautiful but partial illustration of the generalization of that example in certain directions.<sup>1</sup> It by no means exhausts the meaning of the great example.

Christ needs no patronage of philosopher or poet ; but a familiar acknowledgement of His supremacy in this respect may be put in as evidence. 'Even now,' said J. S. Mill, 'it would not be easy even for an unbeliever to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life.'<sup>2</sup>

One reason, by no means the strongest, why the passionate devotion of Christians has centred in Jesus Christ, is that in Him they have found the living embodiment of character of the highest and noblest kind. The strongest reason for that personal devotion is that by the meaning of His life and work, and personal relation to

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Stalker, *Imago Christi*, Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> *Essay on Religion*, p. 255 : cp. Geikie's *Life of Christ*, Introduction ; also Martensen, § 73.



Him, that character is communicated in vitality to ourselves. Christ supremely taught by what He was. He set before the race His own rich personality, overflowing with love, luminous with truth, pulsating with moral power. Deep in the secret of His being was the secret of moral excellence.

2. *The relation of Christ's example to law as standard.* We have distinguished between *natural* law, which represents the observed uniformity of phenomena, *political* law, or the recognized restrictions of society on the deeds of its members, and *moral* law, which states what ought to be. The connexion between these two last is very close.

The code of criminal enactments is the crystallization of the ethical principles of a particular community, and may be subject to modification as the ideas of the community change; but as law it is rigid and fixed. Any rational alteration is an attempt to make the law a more perfect expression of principles at work in the community. We must reckon with the existence of both law and principle among reasoning beings. Whatever the institutional authority of law, whatever the form of government, the real authority for rational beings is the principle or rational basis upon which it rests.



In the first instance, every one meets moral obligation in the form of law. It is only as the individual mind matures that it rises beyond the letter of the law to a higher rational authority. The law is then discovered to be only an imperfect and limited expression of that which claims intelligent obedience of a more comprehensive and thorough kind. The same process takes place in the progress of the race. Certain actions are plainly detrimental to social well-being, and in rough undiscriminating form are condemned. The adjustment of conflicting impulses is brought about by a law as a preliminary induction. Hence arise prohibitions : thou shalt not murder, lie, steal, and so forth. Such an admission of the method of social order leaves untouched the origin and destiny of the impulse it represents. The stimulus of progress is in the imperfection of such inductive laws, and the perception of their imperfection is the vital germ of morality. The prohibitions are of necessity negative and external ; morality must be positive and inward to be progressive. It is difficult if not impossible to reconstruct the moral life of ancient times and to depict its inner meaning ; but there are at least glimmerings suggested from historic times of that independent moral consciousness that moulds

and fashions laws and institutions to a higher pattern, under the guidance of man's loftiest aspirations.

The Ten Commandments are of special interest in this connexion. The existence of the Decalogue as the basis of Jewish moral law is unquestionable. It is the main stem from which the Mosaic Code is an expansion. It owes its pre-eminence to its condensed form of distinctly moral injunction. But nothing is more clear than the recognition of a broader basis in the theocratic government of Israel. The existence of judges, prophets, and psalmists are witness of that living capacity of higher moral relations of which the law was only a partial expression. In the elaboration of mere external ceremonial and rabbinical tradition the legal conception of ethical standard worked itself out to its own destruction. It ran to seed in pharisaic minutiae of immoral casuistical subtlety, and conceptions of God as remote from the life of men.

From the first, however, there were present elements of ethical character, deeper, and vitally assimilative of divergent elements and what might otherwise seem antagonistic laws.

It is this which gives the Old Testament its unique value. It is descriptive of the

progress of a people in a unique position in the development of the race. In some of the primitive heroes are imperfections open to criticism from our own standpoint; but these heroes stand out in rough magnificence by reason of essentially progressive elements of character. The reference of conduct to God, and the absoluteness of obedience to Him, make the moral heroism and sublimity in the biographies of those early times. The story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. xxii.), for instance, might be a frontispiece. It reveals the disciplinary character of that early training, and yet the sequel is the foreshadowing of God as, not an arbitrary ruler of the affairs of men, but self-consistent goodness. Faith was the confidence and loyalty of obedience to the good on the part of the individual with regard to the future, and had a prominent place from first to last. But here what is demonstrated is the insufficiency of law in itself. At last that which lay behind broke through the form of national code to achieve greater possibilities on a wider stage than Jewish life. In the fullness of time Christ came not to destroy but to fulfil the law, by a more perfect portrayal of perfect humanity. The title He most frequently used of Himself, 'the Son of man,' was the expression of this

position of Christ as the ideal and type of the race. In conflict with the Pharisees concerning the Sabbath (Mark ii. 23-8), He illustrates from their own history the subordination of their law to higher necessity in the incident of David satisfying his hunger with the shew-bread ; and then, forcing home the argument He declares, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath : so that the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath.' The law as a means may be superseded or modified, though always in *the interests of the end for which the law exists*. As the Son of man He claimed authority to distinguish the essential from the contingent or accidental elements of the law.

The issue of the national discipline of Israel was the conception of Jehovah as alone the God of righteousness, and the kingdom of God as the privileged inheritance of His people. The true nature of that kingdom as a spiritual dominion, having its foundation in personal relation to God as the Father of spirits, is the distinct element of the teaching of Jesus. He is Himself the ideal of character in light of that revelation.

But while thus relegating the law of Moses and law in general to a subordinate position, and

substituting the maxim, 'Be this,' in place of 'Do or do not this,' the teaching of Christian ethics does not renounce the use of law. Subordination is not destruction. While admitting its imperfect external negative character, it is capable of being the partial and practical expression of that which is inherent in the ideal.

3. *New Testament teaching concerning Christ as example.* That the life of Christ has such authority as an example is easily demonstrated from the New Testament. The meaning of Jesus Christ as the Light of the world is not limited to the truths revealed in verbal form. The writer of the Fourth Gospel expresses this: 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth' (John i. 14). The unique life of Christ among its many-sided meanings has this, that it is set forth as the mystic pattern of the perfect life. By that we mean that it is a pattern of the perfect life in a sense to be understood only by living communion of the inner life. By all Christ was and did, as well as by what He said, He reveals man to Himself as well as God to man.

On the particular occasion of the feet-washing (John xiii.) Christ said, 'I have given you an

example that ye also should do as I have done to you' (verse 15). It was not in the mere performance of the act, but in the spirit of self-renunciation, humility, and service, which are primary social virtues of the kingdom of God. It was an incident set in the foreground of His own death that the essential quality might be seen, of which that death was the sublime and supreme exhibition. It is in harmony with such an inwardness that we read, 'Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that ye should follow His steps' (1 Pet. ii. 21).

Another illustration is seen (Heb. xii. 1-2). The long catalogue of the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews is brought to a climax in the twelfth. 'Seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.' And the writer continues to elaborate the meaning of the example of Christ in respect of that exercise of faith.

It was with penetration into the underlying secret of that life that St. Paul wrote to the Philippians (ii. 5), 'Have this *mind* in you which was also in Christ Jesus,' and he expounds

the highest and deepest meaning of that life of self-surrender.

From these and other passages may be gathered, the special meaning of the example of Christ. As conscious of that relation to God in which all other ethical relations are harmonized, He revealed in the particular circumstances of His own life and in conflict with the prevailing conduct of His generation that attitude towards the material and social conditions of human life which must be adopted by all who would realize the same ultimate end. The analysis of that attitude, and the realization of the ideal, will next be our thought. But the conclusion of our examination of this unique feature of the Christian standard may be described as follows.

(i) It is *historic*. It is no abstract or imaginary description. It is a life lived out amid actual scenes. No literary criticism of the New Testament affects this statement. Neither its historic influence nor its historic basis are touched. Its actuality is the fulcrum of its moral leverage. Its first exponents declare, 'That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us : yea, and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ ' (1 John i. 3).



(ii) It is *positive*. In contrast to all merely negative or restrictive regulation of conduct, the Christian standard of the example of Christ is set before us in the fullness of robust positive direction. It is stimulative, not repressive. Christ set before men His own life, throbbing with positive love to God and men, and thus revealing that from which all goodness grows ; a life more comprehensive than any catalogue of duties could ever be, more complete than any code of rules could compass.

(iii) It is *inward*. It is productive of character, not satisfied with external reproduction of deeds. The inward motive is the test of real worth. We have already considered this as the method of testing the worth of conduct.<sup>1</sup> The standard set up in the example of Jesus Christ is in harmony with the general requirement. The so-called theological virtues are not legitimately separated from any other virtues ; they are those virtues reduced to ultimate factors, reduced to a common denominator as it were—the inward aspect of those deeds which have genuine ethical worth. From faith and hope and love exercised towards their proper object spring all forms of truth and goodness. Not only in the condemnation of incipient

<sup>1</sup> P. 58, *seq.*



evil, but as the promise of all good, inward character is always the object of regard, and the key to the example of Christ.

Spirits are not finely touch'd  
But to fine issues,<sup>1</sup>

and it is that inward condition from which all nobility is possible of which Christ is the criterion.

(iv) It is *personal*. The worth of the individual is never sacrificed. Personality is the constant element of all that Christian ethics will accept in its calculations. Its standard is a person, and from that centre all moral excellence radiates. The wider and wider circles of personal relationship come under the harmonizing control of the Personal Example, in whom they are perfectly fulfilled.

(v) It is *progressive*. As partially realized the example of Christ has powerfully affected history. Love and liberty are growing forces in the affairs of men. But it is only gradually their full meaning is apprehended. It is only as personal experience widens and deepens that the full capacity of the Christ-life is seen. But 'if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His' (Rom. viii. 9). Like the leaven,

<sup>1</sup> *Measure for Measure*, Act I, sc. 1.

the Spirit of Christ works in human character till 'every thought be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ' (2 Cor. x. 5). Towards the full consummation of the kingdom of God we believe the world slowly moves, and to that end every life lived in harmony with the standard of Christ's example makes its contribution of progress.

The meaning grows. The full social implication only slowly dawns upon the minds of men; but its authority abides 'till we all attain . . . unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' (Eph. iv. 13), and the 'Christ that is to be' be formed in the hearts of men.

## CHAPTER IX

### *CHRIST AND THE MORAL CONFLICT*<sup>1</sup>

TO appreciate the specific features of Christian ethics we have to keep in constant touch with its theory of human nature. All that theory entails covers a wider area ; but in the sphere of character and conduct the moral conflict has a conspicuous place. There is much more concord as to Christian character than as to the doctrines associated therewith and ecclesiastical organization, and we have considered the evidence of that deep defect of human nature by which the moral conflict is most adequately accounted for. This moral conflict is the unescapable condition of the moral problems of mankind. We necessarily revert to it after discussing the Christian theory of the *summum bonum* and its bearing upon mere rational answers to the question, what is the highest good ?

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Mackenzie, *Manual of Ethics*, Book III. Chap. V. VI. ; Wendt, *Teaching of Jesus*, § III. Chap. VII. ; John Caird, *Philosophy of Religion*, Chap. IX. ; Wace, *Christianity and Morality*, Chap. VI. VII. ; W. L. Watkinson, *Transfigured Sackcloth*.

Even more closely akin to the moral conflict is the contemplation of the Christian standard of the example of Jesus Christ. If the most desirable is not always effectively desired, still less is the acknowledged perfection of human character realized in human experience. We have the perpetual variance between the ideal and the actual in morals, and it is in the intervening area between the actual and the ideal that the drama of ethical life takes place. In the realization of the ideal is involved an answer to several distinct questions :

1. What are the inward personal dispositions from which spring actions calculated to achieve the consummation of the Christian end ?

2. How is the conflict overcome ? How is the antagonism reconciled between primitive impulse and human weakness on the one hand, and enlightened judgement and noblest purpose on the other ?

3. What is the method of progress in Christian character, especially as it affects common notions of goodness ?

4. What are the practical forms of good conduct thereby accomplished ? What are the Christian virtues as contrasted with excellences ordinarily approved ?

5. What is the application of Christian ethical theory to existing social institutions?

6. What is the Christian estimate of the issue of the moral order of the universe and individual life?

It is the first two of these questions which are now before us—the inward dispositions which are the spring of Christian conduct, and their bearing upon the moral conflict.

In Chapter V. we examined the facts of life and consciousness which evince the necessity of some theory as to this moral conflict. Between natural impulse and higher considerations, between selfish prudence and heroic self-forgetfulness, there is a gulf to be bridged not only in theoretical harmonizing of the claims of each, but in the practical attainment of the higher aims.

Between existing standards of behaviour and the inward sense of duty there may be strife. Between alternative courses of action there may be a difficulty of choice. These are indicative of the division of the good and evil, and are symptoms of the deep malady of the will. If they be regarded as due to differences of knowledge, yet that deficiency is a fact to be dealt with. We believe it is one of many indications of the lapse and deformity of our nature. But

conscious and deliberate wrong-doing may exist side by side with enlightenment. Vice and sin do but represent different conceptions of the same fact in human history. Positive or so-called scientific ethics cannot evade it. Such writers may refuse to locate responsibility and blame in the individual, and arm society with machinery and authority to correct moral eccentricity within certain limits, but they cannot ignore the existence of bad men. Still further, even the authority by which and the end for which society exercises its powers are to be vindicated. The restraint is sociological and administrative; but if that correction of the individual is to be ethical it must be adapted to man's personal consciousness, and justified thereby. No non-personal treatment of mankind is ethical. Whatever be the social goal, it is reached by individual acts. The individual cannot be properly perfected apart from social relations. Over self-cultivation means degeneration if social sympathies be withered and social obligations overlooked. Yet, on the other part, if a man is to forget himself in the heroic espousal of interests wider than his own direct advantage, it must be by the voluntary acceptance of the end to the realization of which his personal efforts contribute; otherwise his actions lose their ethical value.

In all moral progress the individual life is the centre of interest and importance, and Christian teaching goes to the root of the matter in locating evil in the attitude each one maintains toward the possible alternatives of conduct. The improvement of environment must be under the guidance of a true estimate of the worth and quality of the life to be lived therein. Christian teaching extends its explanation of evil to its theory of the race and nature, and the disorganized state of the world in relation to goodness; but in ethics it directs attention to the personal relations of the individual. When it is objected that it is better to keep to a positive and descriptive treatment of morality, the rejoinder is that no such treatment can suffice. In so far as it is associated with an attempt to direct conduct and form character, it advances beyond its descriptive limits. It sets up metaphorical standards of 'health,' or social 'equilibrium,' which are only ethical so far as they are metaphorical, and so far as they are metaphorical they vaguely suggest an ideal. Such standards require interpretation and adaptation to the personal needs of the case. Christianity claims to provide that, and to be able to exercise a moral force in face of the conflict that exists, which is possible in no other way.

The discussion of the remedy offered and its justification has to do with theology. The doctrine of the atonement<sup>1</sup> and of the Holy Spirit are the subjects of theological teaching. Justification and salvation are the distinctly religious topics. We have here to do with the dispositions insisted upon, and their ethical value.

1. *Repentance*. By the use of this term we reach the most vital condition of all moral improvement. There are associated with it other words, of kindred meaning. Thus, *conversion* is a normal fact in moral development, covering a wider area of experience than that referred to by repentance. It is the whole process of inward moral revolution, associated with the transition from one standard of conduct to another, and a vigorous or vital attitude towards that new standard. 'This phenomenon occurs when a man is made aware of a higher universe than that within which he is living, and at the same time becomes conscious that that higher universe is one within which he ought to live.'<sup>2</sup>

It may be classified according to specific features with less profoundly significant transi-

<sup>1</sup> Vide Dale, *The Atonement*; Lidgett, *The Spiritual Principle of the Atonement*; Wace, *Morality and Christianity*, Lect. VI.

<sup>2</sup> Mackenzie, p. 355.



tions than moral transformation ; but the breadth and depth of moral interests in life make such a transition of supreme importance.

Hence, in instituting the 'universe' of the kingdom of God, and His own personal character as the guide and norm for men, Jesus Christ emphasized repentance as the prime condition. To produce 'conviction of sin' is the germ of all moral improvement. It is the condition of membership in the kingdom of God.

It was the universal need of repentance which so often and so strikingly brought Jesus into conflict with the legalism of the Pharisees. 'Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish' (Luke xiii. 5) was His challenge to those who in spiritual deadness measured all by the external rules of behaviour, and who regarded material security as the evidence of divine favour. Disaster was identical with the existence of moral wrong with the contemporary Jews. The capacity to appreciate a higher level of conduct made more hopeful the moral condition of publicans and sinners than that of those who were self-satisfied and self-righteous (Luke xv.). The parable of the prodigal, the lost sheep, the lost coin, are typical of the attitude Jesus Christ maintained to those whose recognized moral condition was one of need or loss. The whole have no need of a

physician, but they that are sick (Matt. ix. 12 ; Mark ii. 17).

This consciousness of the need of a fresh moral universe lies at the root of the repeated enforcement of the need of the new birth (John iii.). 'Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' The ethical significance is plain. There must be an inward reversal of the conceptions of moral life, which fall short of those Christ revealed. Only by personal relation, such as He declares may be instituted between each individual and his fellow men, as the consequence of new personal relation to God, can man's moral nature find its proper and mature growth. In that way only can the conflicting tendencies to action be adjusted and harmonized. When in regard to the will of God there is neither conflict nor despair in the individual will, then the achievement of perfection of character has become possible. Apart from the sense of estrangement such conscious reconciliation cannot be achieved. The remedy which Christ offers for this moral estrangement of our nature from the good is reconciliation with God, as the supreme personal relationship in which the good is to be realized. Moral affinity is only possible by the way of penitence. 'Without emotional repentance we must part, or remain on a lower

level of intercourse, but we cannot grow in intimacy and the insight which intimacy brings.' <sup>1</sup> The inheritance of sin and infirmity which we bear cannot be obliterated nor disregarded ; it must be consciously superseded by a process more profound than mere amendment, but of which the recognized necessity of amendment and desire of amendment are the first conditions.

2. *Faith*. By this Jesus Christ always implied a disposition towards Himself and His teaching of an essential kind. Without a trustful receptiveness the necessary condition of the blessings which He declared was lacking. How prominently this figures in the stories of the gospel needs hardly to be illustrated (cp. Matt. viii. 10 ; Mark ii. 5, iv. 40 ; Luke vii. 9, &c.) ; but with regard to the meaning and value of this attitude from an ethical standpoint, too often it has been obscured by its interpretation as intellectual assent to certain doctrines of the Church of a distinctly metaphysical kind. It does not follow that an analysis of the ethical significance of faith supersedes the necessity of those doctrines, and of intellectual apprehension of their meaning. It is impossible to disentangle the religious from the purely ethical teaching of Jesus. But as we have endeavoured

<sup>1</sup> Illingworth, *Personality, Human and Divine*, Lect. V.

so to do in setting forth the meaning of the kingdom of God, so it is possible so far to dissociate faith from its object, except so far as that object involves the acceptance and attainment of an ethical ideal. Dealing with the inner disposition of faith Jesus reveals the intimate connexion between such an inward disposition and moral excellence. He boldly declared that a willingness to obey, a receptivity of mind to moral excellence, is the basis of reception of Him and His message. Notably in the fourth gospel this is explicitly stated: 'This is the judgement, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil' (iii. 18-20). His witness was against the evil of the world (vii. 7). The truth He declared, and of which He claimed sovereignty, was moral truth in its bearing upon and consequence in the experience of men (xviii. 37). So blindness to the truth declared was moral obliquity (ix. 41), and upon preparedness to obey He rested the testing of His truth (vii. 17).<sup>1</sup>

Faith, therefore, is incipient or potential obedience towards the claims of moral excellence. It is both the receptivity and responsiveness of

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Illingworth, *op. cit.* Lect. V.

the nature of man, mind, affections, and will, towards the moral ideal and its realization. 'It is an intellectual act, for it is a form of knowledge; it is an emotional attitude and activity, for it trusts persons and works by love; it is a moral intuition, for it sees obligations in truth and right in duty. It is not a single or occasional act, though it be compared to a vision which for a moment looks into eternity and never forgets what it has seen; but it is continuous communion with the things the vision saw. . . . In both aspects as knowledge and as vision faith is a receptivity; it is a man standing open to the touch and action of the eternal, yet as also sensitive and active, holding fast to what has been received.'<sup>1</sup> Thus faith is the subjective pivot of the moral life, and according to the teaching of Jesus, apart from this deep motive actions may be wanting in moral value. They may even receive greater condemnation when combined with insincere pretension (Mark xii. 38-40 : cp. Matt. xxiii. 5). Such an inward state is elevated above all self-righteousness (Luke xviii. 9-14), even where much may be lacking.

3. *Love.* Christ summed up the vital inward moral quality in the idea of love. That movement

<sup>1</sup> Fairbairn, *Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 548.

of the will towards a higher 'universe' is associated with such mental receptiveness and attention as is involved in faith. But the one complex state may be viewed from the affectional or emotional side, and be stated in terms of feeling as love. It was in this way Christ summed the commandments of the Decalogue: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' (Mark xii. 31-2).

Thus in the two personal relations of which man can be conscious, all laws are subsumed under the one law of love; or to put the case more accurately, the performance of all law that directs conduct to the attainment of the moral end, and the security of that end irrespective of particular laws, is guaranteed by that inward disposition towards all moral obligation expressed by love.

Love is the identification of self with the interests of another, by reason of subtle sympathy. The ground of that sympathy, its dynamic force, are matters which take us into the mysteries of religious life. How Christ took that passion, so pitiful and powerful and tragic in the destiny of men, and lifted it into a

transcendent ethical power, is the grand moral miracle of Christian history, the great challenge of Christian apologetics.

The love which poets had praised was a passion for possession; 'but out of this love Christ made the most self-forgetful of forces, a law that moved man toward righteousness and all benevolence. We may call it by many names, but no name is equal to all its activities and attributes. It is an enthusiasm for humanity . . . but however named it is a passion to serve men for love of Christ. And He invested this love with the qualities that made it not an occasional and fitful, but a constant energy, an invariable moral dynamic.'<sup>1</sup>

The all-important questions of the nature and work of our Lord as Redeemer lie behind this great fact in man's moral history; and apart from that reconciliation of the cross, the constraining power of the love of Christ is an enigma. But as an inward disposition by which the realization of the moral ideal becomes possible, it has a breadth and depth of meaning that exhausts all possibility of precept and law.

'There is an ethical counterpart to the correlation of physical forces. . . . More marvellous are the correlations and persistent permutations

<sup>1</sup> Fairbairn, *Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 509.



of the ethical energy, which we call the love of Christ. It began to be in Him and with Him, and without increase or decrease it took shape in the men He made apostles ; then, without any loss of momentum or intensity, changed its form and appeared as sub-apostolic men : apologists, fathers, and churches which rose round the shores of the tideless Mediterranean ; then as missionaries who wandered through many lands, creating new peoples in the Syrian desert, in central Europe, on the bleak shores of the northern seas, and in furthest Asia. And dispersion did not dissipate it, for the lapse of time has not exhausted its energy ; on the contrary, expenditure has only seemed to increase its potency and the capacity for conversion into forms still more infinite and varied.’<sup>1</sup>

As to the moral conflict, love is such a thorough and complete espousal of the alternative of good as against evil, that the conflict ceases by reason of the suppression of the opposed tendency. It is the enthronement of the cause of the good where only in personality supremacy is possible in the affections and desires ‘of the heart.’ From that inner sanctum issues every direction of the will, every judgement

<sup>1</sup> Fairbairn, *op. cit.* p. 512: cp. testimony of Dr. Gulick to Prof. Romanes, quoted in *Spiritual Religion* by Prof. Tasker, p. 175.



of the mind. This disposition of love is set by Jesus in opposition to all non-ethical interpretations of religion. In harmony with the Hebrew prophets, but with an explicitness, depth, and universality they did not know, He proclaimed mercy better than sacrifice, and inward obedience more than ritual.<sup>1</sup> Referring to love as the supreme motive taught by Christ, Wendt writes : 'Here we must recognise His characteristic and epoch-making pre-eminence on the ethical side over all previous expositions and demonstrations of duty either in the Old Testament or of all heathen religions and philosophers.'<sup>2</sup> Goodness was thus established upon the basis of an inwardly constraining emotion.

4. *Self-surrender.* Such love, as the motive and dynamic of the soul whereby all conflict between a recognized rational good as interpreted in the light of the ideal of the kingdom of God, and any lower or antagonistic tendency of personal choice, was convertible to terms of uncompromising self-surrender. The apparent complete and exacting thoroughness is only intelligible in view of the willing espousal of the interests and 'universe' of the kingdom of God.

With regard to the merely natural impulse of man, its form was a *renunciation of worldly*

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Hos. vi. 6, &c.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit. Vol. II. p. 330.

*goods.* By reason of that, earthly possessions are a natural impediment to rising to the higher plane of character to which Christ sought to lift men. Though comparable to a feast in its rich satisfaction to the spirit of man, the invitation of the kingdom is set on one side by excuses based upon choice of particular material benefit (Luke xiv. 15 ff.). The parable of Dives and Lazarus is given to illustrate the preliminary advantage of meagre over sumptuous provision for material satisfaction (Luke xvi. 19 ff.) Christ proclaimed, 'How hardly shall they that trust in riches enter the kingdom of God' (Mark x. 23).

Any loss, even of eye or hand, was preferable to any faltering in choice between the ideal of the kingdom of God and any mere material pleasure or gain. Further, merely natural relationships were second to those which had spiritual value. Identifying Himself with the interests of the truth and kingdom of heaven, Jesus Christ put all earthly relationships in subordination. He Himself regards as brethren such as do the will of the Father (Matt. xii. 48). Worthiness for discipleship is tested by this superiority of attachment (Matt. x. 37, viii. 22). Fidelity to Himself means often conflict (x. 35), yet abundant recompense (Matt. xix. 29). Such self-denial was to be ultimate, 'even to the

scaffold' (Matt. x. 38), while on four distinct occasions is recorded the utterance, 'He that loveth his life shall lose it; but whoso shall lose his life for My sake, the same shall find it' (Matt. x. 39; Luke ix. 24, xvii. 33; John xii. 25).

All this is far removed from asceticism for asceticism's sake; such would be a mere parasitic virtue. Apart from the moral conflict, there is a geniality about the teaching of Jesus. The renunciation is not absolute in the sense of actual and arbitrary demand, irrespective of occasion and rational necessity. It is Christ's answer to the question, can reason be a law to itself, realize its own universality and freedom, and yet leave to the natural desires scope for their proper activity? Can we live a life at once natural and spiritual, universal and particular? The particular is to be absorbed, taken up, and used by absolute surrender to the higher universal. It is by permeation of the particular with universal motive that self-realization takes place in the highest form. The capacity of love and self-sacrifice is the capacity for this alliance or amalgamation of divers elements in human experience. Its theatre is in the life of the community, and a fuller life is lived amid the

symmetrical co-ordination of all relationships under one inspiring and directing aim.<sup>1</sup>

Christ did not teach the dissolution of earthly relationships. He sanctioned and elevated such ties. He did not discourage the sustenance of earthly life; but the retention and use must be directed ultimately toward the promotion of the kingdom of God according to the particular circumstances of the individual (Matt. xix. 11 ff.; Luke ix. 57, &c.).

Such is the method of Christian ethics with regard to the moral conflict. It is the subordination and yet absorption of all the interests and impulses of life to one comprehensive and controlling ideal. Of this Christ Himself is the supreme pattern.

His own death was a free act of love and surrender in the fulfilment of a divine purpose. It was not an irresistible destiny (John x. 10-18, xvi. 33). Yet there was oneness with the Father in His eternal purpose. To men conscious of weakness and guilt, such unity can only be restored by participation with the meaning of His death. Personal attachment to Christ is the whole atmosphere, the environment, the soil and root of the mature development of man's moral nature as set forth in Christian teaching.

<sup>1</sup> John Caird, *Philosophy of Religion*, Chap. IX.

It colours the whole of moral life with the bright hues of a revelation of divine love.

Hence arises the peculiar *optimism* of Christian ethics. The problem of the existence of suffering and evil looms like a heavy thunder-cloud upon the horizon of this world of moral strife. It is full of perplexing difficulty ; but the indomitable and courageous optimism of Christianity is such that hope becomes a duty.

All that is endured by the individual and the race is somehow subservient, even as Christ's own death, to the victory of love and goodness in the affairs of men. This is not a shallow deistic treatment of the sorrows of the individual.<sup>1</sup> It is not a pantheistic denial of the reality of this tragic dualism ; but an unconquerable steadfastness of hope that wisdom and goodness reign supreme.

There shall never be one lost good ! What was, shall  
live as before ;

The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound ;  
What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much  
good more ;

On the earth the broken arcs ; in the heaven, a perfect  
round.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Pope, *Essay on Man*.

<sup>2</sup> R. Browning, *Abt Vogler*. The poetry of Browning is full of this robust optimism, as illustrated also in *Asolando* and *Rabbi Ben Ezra*.

## CHAPTER X

### *ETHICAL PROGRESS; CONSCIENCE*<sup>1</sup>

HAVING examined the method in which Christian ethics has its roots in inward character, and bridges the gulf between the natural and moral order as they both co-exist in the individual; having seen also how the conflict between the individual and the social environment has its pledge of harmony and reconciliation in the supreme personal relationship between God and the soul as represented in Jesus Christ—there are further questions that arise.

Granted that this adjustment of all man's moral relations is guaranteed by the proper attitude to God and the essential dispositions for that attitude, still it may be asked, what is the bearing of this ethical revelation and its realization upon the non-religious reasonings

<sup>1</sup> Martensen, §§ 113-20; Davison, *The Christian Conscience*, especially Chap. IV. & VI.; Dorner, Div. II. Sec. II. §§ 24-6.

of mankind and the non-Christian standards ? What is the state of the case in face of the actual facts of man's moral progress ? <sup>1</sup>

It has been the object of the foregoing pages to show how this Christian view of man's moral life is the clear and adequate expression of that which is admitted or is the blind aspiration of man's being ; that there is given comprehensiveness and depth to the requirement of man's moral nature in the revelation of Christ Jesus. But it is clear that there are elements which cannot be assimilated to the Christian teaching ; and also that among those who accept it, the realization is unequal, various, and at best only partial in accomplishment. What then is the Christian view of ethical progress, and its place in the general progress of the race ?

In thinking of Christ as an example we saw the relation of such a standard to the primitive standard of law, and how that standard of law originates, and yet how it fails to supply any unity of ethical principle or vitally progressive method of moral development. In considering the goal of moral endeavour, or the *summum bonum*, we saw how other systems omit or over-emphasize some phase of the moral problem. Apart from their onesidedness, or

<sup>1</sup> Cp. above, pp. 182-3.



over-emphasis, Christianity accepts or absorbs all moral truth contained in other systems. It presents a goal or climax, and in proportion as its message is received there is the qualification for the utmost possibilities of humanity. Though it be as a grain of mustard seed, its growth has infinite potency. It is like leaven, it can permeate all human affairs and transmute every action. It is as salt, saving human society from materialistic or egoistic disintegration and decay. Though it exist as wheat among tares in the conflicting thoughts and theories of men, it is destined to finally triumph in the order of the world. Its ideal and hope are like the pearl of great price, or the hid treasure, for the securing of which any sacrifice is small in comparison. But while thus in the midst of men, the present is a time of progress and struggle toward the end. It is 'the light that lighteneth every man coming into the world.' It is the clear and complete transcription of 'the law written on the heart'; but the method whereby it commends itself and achieves itself has to be described. Christianity is not syncretic, i.e. it is not a deliberate attempt to fit in artificially various systems. There is no such mechanical scheme. 'It is not an articulated skeleton, but a living organism. . . . It grows,

not by artificial addition, but by transmuting into its own substance the matter its environment supplies.’<sup>1</sup> This is illustrated in the idea of righteousness and the meaning of conscience.

## I. RIGHTEOUSNESS

The idea of the right is associated with a legal conception of ethical obligation. It is conformity with rule. Whatever be the prehistoric origin of morality, its authority is independent of its method of genesis. It becomes known to us as it objectifies itself in the legal institutions of particular races and periods. But these are clearly but phases of the vital moral principle of mankind, and only its primitive partial expression. We believe the contradiction of moral codes is often exaggerated and more apparent than real. Thus, while Spartan morals seem to have approved of theft, it is really approval of endurance and skill rather than of explicit violence to the fundamental rights of possession in the community. There is a glowing centre of general accord in moral systems. There is a chorus of assent on many topics of duty. But such an example shows how law is the process always admitting of

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Fairbairn, *Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 518.

readjustment and improvement, and it is the means whereby the moral consciousness of the community formulates its judgement. So that righteousness is conformity with the tribal conscience as expressed in law.

Now, any bare adhesion to the letter of the law is suicidal in morality by reason of its externalism; but fidelity to law contains in itself the germ or the essential social feature of ethics. Recognition of such social obligation is righteousness. The use of the term 'rights' is the recognition of the social bond on the side of privileges which always involve correlative responsibilities. Natural rights interpreted on the broadest scale involve the conception of the solidarity of the race, and the normal claims of the individual as a part of humanity. The broader the conception of the community the more universal will be the rights and responsibilities of the individual. It is equally true, the less adequate that conception of the solidarity of the race, the more meagre and simple and so far insufficient will be the estimate of those rights. Still, they may be capable of explanation and completion, as the humanitarian element of Stoicism was expanded and vitalized under the genial influence of Christianity.

That which in the Greek thought of Plato

and Aristotle stood for justice, in Christian ethics is represented by righteousness. But in the kingdom of God righteousness is transfigured by the thought of sonship to God and of the brotherhood of men. Thus the relationship between society and the individual is a mutual or reciprocal one. The individual has obligations to the community; the community has obligations to the individual. Individual obligation, as enforced by the state or community, is righteousness; social obligations to the individual are rights.

But the actual content may vary according to any particular standard. Now, therefore, the righteousness of Christian ethics is conformity with the standard set up in Jesus Christ. In so far as that ideal demands an inward disposition of receptiveness or faith, that *faith is potential of all righteousness*, of more and more perfect conformity to the standard as it may be progressively realized.

This is the radical ethical meaning of justification by faith, although it does not exhaust the religious meaning of that theological doctrine.

Righteousness becomes dissociated from every other standard; yet only by a gradual process of enlightenment and progress do the ethical principles and consequent practices of Christ's

teaching correct or triumph over the less complete and imperfect standards. And this aspect of the moral conflict is the progressive realization of the Christian ideal in the history of men. Wherein that ideal still conflicts with existing standards can best be seen in each particular department of moral life. But it is necessary to remember righteousness becomes a conception of a progressive kind. Its content grows as the moral consciousness of the community grows. In contrast to the civic meaning of justice prevailing in Greek ethics we have a righteousness that embraces all the race and man's natural life as well. In contrast to all naturalistic standards, we have the synthesis and harmony of all personal relations in our relation to a Personal God.<sup>1</sup>

How this has affected the moral progress of mankind is the story of history. The place of Christ and the problem of Christ in history is the greatest evidence and apology of the Christian religion. He who, 'holiest among the mighty, the mightiest among the holy, lifted empires off their hinges and turned the stream of centuries out of its channel.' (Jean Paul Richter), is One who cannot lightly be set aside. The effect of the teaching and influence of Christ in the

<sup>1</sup> Vide 'Righteousness a Personal Relation,' Lect. III., Wace, *Christianity and Morality*.

story of western civilization cannot be ignored. In the directions of philanthropy and self-denial it has been the most potent force and the most illuminating guide the world has ever seen.

This is not the place to state fully historic results of Christ's teaching<sup>1</sup> ; only that it affords justification for the statement of the theory of a progressive realization of the Christian ideal :

Yet I doubt not through the ages one increasing  
purpose runs,  
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process  
of the suns.<sup>2</sup>

Gradually righteousness, set free from its etymological narrowness and representative of the highest ethical possibilities of the race, shall come to expression in the highest good of the universe, the triumph of the kingdom of God.

## II. CONSCIENCE

The question now arises, what is the instrument of this progress? To what faculty of human nature does Christianity make its challenge, and through what capacity in human nature do we claim its ultimate victory? The answer is, conscience. To some it may seem a

<sup>1</sup> Vide Fairbairn, *Philosophy of the Christian Religion*; Seeley, *Ecce Homo*; Gesta Christi; Lecky, *History of European Morals*, &c.

<sup>2</sup> Tennyson, *Locksley Hall*.

mistaken order to have spoken of the growing conception of righteousness in the community before dealing with the individual. The rational order, however, is to explain certain historical facts in relation to the Christian ethical theory. If we were merely discussing a speculative system out of any historical and practical bearing on the affairs of men, or untried in actual events, the problem would be different. We are convinced that in Jesus Christ certain elements in human history reach a climax and crisis, and also a new starting place. His advent was a new epoch, and marked a new era in the world's story, the full consequences of which are not yet. They are supremely ethical. To explain as far as possible their method and quality is the end we have in view. We have noticed some of these in regard to man's moral consciousness. Now we ask, what is the method of moral development?

Externally it is a growing conception of righteousness, to which all the social and educational institutions of mankind shall gradually be conformed. Internally, we find the measure and instrument of that growth in individual conscience.

In some sense Christian ethics may be regarded as a rationale of human history; that



is, it is selective of certain actually existing tendencies which it accepts, and of which it is largely creative or provides such an impetus in the development as did not previously exist. It becomes thereby interpretative of the destiny of the race. But the crucible, so to speak, of conflicting theories is the individual conscience. The battlefield where Christianity gains a prophetic victory is personal consciousness. Since the ideal of the kingdom of God is a realm of personal relations, in which all the complications are mutually adjusted and harmonized to the attainment of the utmost blessedness, the practical object of Christian ethics is the multiplication of individuals in whom this kingdom is implanted. Looked at from the external aspect of that kingdom we must say that practical object is the incorporation of individuals in that community which is controlled by the ideal of the kingdom. But looked at from the standpoint of the inward character, that kingdom is made supreme already in the individual heart. The moral development of the race works itself out through individual moral consciousness. That is the point of attack and triumph. It is 'by the manifestation of the truth commending *itself* to every man's conscience in the sight of God' (2 Cor. iv. 2), that the gospel makes



its challenge. Hence arises the need to explain the Christian view of conscience.

In considering man as a moral agent it was demonstrated what is the peculiar quality of action which alone can give it ethical character, and which demands the interpretation of man's constitution as free and responsible. Here we discuss the function of reason or faculty whereby judgement is pronounced. It is within only that the sentence of commendation or condemnation can be apprehended and be effective.

What is the authority of conscience? Is it derivative? How does it originate? Is it fallible? Can it be educated? Can the idea be analysed? These are some of the questions which must be answered.

The contrast between good and evil makes quite a different impression upon consciousness from all other obligations. Concerns of health or sickness, success or failure in any pursuit, have no such command upon mankind as moral duty. It is this formal element of morality which has the quality of the categorical imperative. That of itself is insufficient to provide direction for universal guidance. It needs the content or material complement of a rational ideal in conformity with which the judgement of conscience can be made.

But while the authority is universal and supreme, and there is a goal and standard whereby conduct and character are to be estimated, it is only *within* that the judgement can be apprehended and prove effective. The goal is the kingdom of God. The standard is the example of Christ.

Through Christ we learn that the personal authority of God upon the individual soul is the climax of all personal obligations. In this sense every duty is a duty to God ; all other authority is mediate and particular. But for the practical guidance of the individual conscience is the instrument of moral administration.

The question of the *origin* of conscience has partly been considered in dealing with the character of moral obligation. It is usual to emphasize, among those who take a materialistic estimate of man, the psychological development of conscience from the social discipline and environment of the individual. But no such analysis exhausts the elements of the moral cognition of the individual. There are co-operative factors in the development of conscience in the individual. The ego altruistic feelings, which are the explanation of society as much as they are explained by society, have a wonderful fashion of revolting against

any letter of social law. Even interpreted of the more fundamental obligations of society, the tragedy and heroism of life, from the days of the Greek drama of Antigone, Socrates, and Luther, to our own time, demonstrate that the finer issues of conduct are felt in the individual heart alone. Every reform begins with the conscience and the protest of an individual. There are capacities of reverence for the highest and the holiest that surpass all expression in existing social sanction. There are, in even aesthetic feeling, elements of independence that are at least prophetic of the more solemn isolation of the ethical judgement of the individual.

Be the origin described ever so perfectly, the validity and reality of the voice within is not thereby destroyed ; the question how the social sanctions have become incorporated in the individual remains.<sup>1</sup> The way in which they are instilled and personalized is one which makes large demands upon our theory of man's moral nature. The dynamic force of the moral obligation, the selective power of consciousness whereby it tests the claims made upon conduct, bring us to see we cannot avoid the endowment of the person with qualifications which, however mysterious, are unique and irreducible.

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Fairbairn, *Philosophy of Christian Religion*, p. 82.

‘Conscience is indeed a human faculty, but its acts do not depend upon the subjective will of the empirical human being. It is rather a power over man. It is not man who possesses conscience, so much as conscience that possesses man.’<sup>1</sup>

Again, upon the other hand, the inalienable authority of conscience has sometimes suffered at the hands of its friends. To assume that its authority is sacred, indefeasible, eternal, and universal, does not compel us to assume a distinct faculty in the sense of organic distinctness. That psychological method is discredited, and is akin to the theory of separate organs of the brain in phrenology. Conscience is a function of judgement, and therefore is related to other exercises of that rational power of man. It is associated with primitive emotions, and also with more complicated sentiments, even as all life is touched with emotion. The peculiar and special emotions of duty, shame, or approval arise from the formal character of these judgements as associated with the fundamental categories of right and wrong. We make no abstraction of man’s nature.<sup>2</sup> Man’s whole nature is of necessity affected by judgements upon that which encompasses his whole being.

<sup>1</sup> Dorner, p. 235.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Ryland, *Manual of Ethics*, p. 135.

Affections, Instincts, Principles, and Powers,  
 Impulse and Reason, Freedom and Control,  
 So men unravelling God's harmonious whole  
 Rend in a thousand shreds this life of ours.  
 Vain labour ! Deep and broad, where none may see,  
 Spring the foundations of that shadowy throne  
 Where man's one Nature, queen-like, sits alone,  
 Centred in a majestic unity.<sup>1</sup>

The term moral 'sense,' as involving any such separation of 'faculty' or divorce between reason and emotion, is fatal to the interests of the highest morality. Hence conscience is the link of connexion between the self which is realized and the medium through which that realization takes place. It is a receptive function of the mind as well as operative, and thus is the capacity for higher illumination and elevation. Its unique character arises from the matter upon which judgement is exercised, and it has a power within correlative to the sacred issues without. The order of the world as moral and spiritual is the only key to the value of moral judgements in individual consciousness. Conscience has stood for that inward protest against external compulsion, the 'everlasting reality that never dies,' amid all perversions of might against right.

Butler regarded conscience as the standard.

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Written in Butler's Sermons*.

He describes it as the 'principle of reflection upon the law of rightness'; though as already remarked, the objective standard is always implicit in Butler. He has been well-known by the dictum concerning conscience: 'Had it strength as it has right, had it power as it has manifest authority, it would absolutely govern the world.'<sup>1</sup> It is true conscience varies in its judgement. But it is no blind, irresponsible rule which confuses our estimates of a Queen Mary, a Charles II, a St. Paul or St. Francis, with the fundamentals of right and wrong by mere subjective intuition. Perversion, lack of enlightenment, explain many personal eccentricities, yet with every one the last word of moral judgement is always individual. What is claimed is this, that each man's judgement in matters of conscience may be so attuned as to be receptive and responsive to the best; that the comprehensive best in personal blessedness and socialized harmony is essentially set forth in the Christian standard.

It has been remarked that 'conflict is due to rival codes affecting our judgment, which are capable of reconciliation by widening the field of view.'<sup>2</sup> This is true if it be remembered

<sup>1</sup> Cp. above, pp. 135-6.

<sup>2</sup> Leslie Stephen, *op. cit.* p. 344.

that the 'codes' are largely imaginary, and the 'reconciliation' may often mean suppression of one tendency or course of action in favour of the higher, and it is just that widening and harmonizing of man's universe of action at which Christianity aims; and it is by a rational justification of its principles that it challenges all opponents.

Again, in harmony with his 'formalism' Kant has declared, 'an erring conscience is a chimera'; but this is only true of the universal or idealized conscience. Individually, much may cause error of judgement. At the same time, we claim the potential endowment of man with such insight into moral issues as will tend to produce unity of moral endeavour. 'We needs must love the highest when we see it,' and if there were no such normal capacity, knowledge itself falls to pieces in mere subjectivism in a similar confusion between truth and opinion. If all men do that which is right in their own eyes, and right be not safeguarded by rigid fidelity to the quality of rightness and the moral content of goodness, conscience itself would become a chimera. But to such intuitive judgement the destiny of the race has ever been committed. No progressive endeavour has arisen apart from individual vision of a nobler social



order ; yet that itself would die without power to commend itself to the judgement of a man's fellow. But as conscience corporates itself or repersonalizes itself in the group of persons it is creative of external righteousness. It is in that sense the accepted judgement of a party is termed the conscience of that party.<sup>1</sup>

It is harmonious with such a theory of conscience that Kant's analysis of what the categorical imperative means was expressed in more positive fashion in his maxims.<sup>2</sup>

1. 'Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become universal law.'

2. 'So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of another, in every case as an end, never as a means only.'

The essential element of moral judgement is expressed, while its satisfaction and direction are implicitly demanded. This is, we believe, alone adequately provided in the revelation of the kingdom of God through Christ Jesus.

The question, therefore, whether conscience can make mistakes, and whether it can be educated, is reduced to a difference of expression. If it be

<sup>1</sup> e.g. "The Nonconformist Conscience."

<sup>2</sup> Cp. above, pp. 133-4.

the abstracted authority of moral judgements it stands by itself. It is maintained justifiably that one might as well propose to teach the eye how and what to see, or reason how to perceive self-evident truth. But if the function of conscience be compared to the visual power, while it is truly an endowment of our nature, it is just the business of education to teach the eye how to see and the mind to judge moral cases correctly. It is the business of every one to enlighten and instruct their minds in moral truth and knowledge which affects duty ; so that such education of conscience is the supreme moral duty. Fallibility of judgement may affect the amount of blame we attach to certain conduct ; but the cause of error of judgement, insufficient knowledge or lack of deliberation, may itself be culpable. It in no way affects the value of conscience as our guide, nor its authoritative witness to the right.

Hence it is nearer the actual facts to regard conscience as meaning particular or individual moral judgement, and as capable of development and progress, rather than as the abstract ideal authority attaching to such judgements. As Martensen states, 'The development of conscience is specially conditional on the development of knowledge. It is also conditional on

the will. The conscience on its human side often requires to be corrected or enlightened, and is always to be cultivated.<sup>1</sup>

The significance of this in Christian ethics is of great importance. The world of moral order is not constituted at the outset of human existence by a fixed code, but is made known to man as a gradual discovery. It exists as a divine thought and plan only to be apprehended by us gradually and in fulfilment of certain conditions. Duty becomes a larger, fuller, richer word as moral sympathies and enlightenment grow.<sup>2</sup> The path of the just grows clearer and clearer, and in this sense conscience is a growth never finished. It is part of the progress of the human race, which each may further or hinder to the extent of his own life.

The Bible teaching concerning man's moral development accords with this description of conscience.<sup>3</sup> The word does not occur in the Old Testament, and is not prominent in the New; but the terms of biblical psychology are not modern, and the ideas prominent in the rational method of approaching the subject

<sup>1</sup> *Christian Ethics*, p. 365 (abbreviated).

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Davison, *The Christian Conscience*, p. 95.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Sec. VI.

are assumed, and have largely to be inferred from the way in which the drama of man's moral life is depicted.

As to the existence and authority of that voice of God, the stories of Eden (Gen. ii.), of Cain and Abel (Gen. iv. 7), of Joseph's brethren (Gen. xlii. 21), of Joseph himself, give striking testimony. The penetrating appeal of the prophets is the bold national challenge of men deeply conscious of the moral supremacy within their own lives, and unflinching in their confidence of an echo to their declaration in the hearts of the people, as well as of its vindication in the order of the world.

The appeal of many of the psalms to this witness of conscious integrity is the constant note with which we become familiar (e.g. Ps. v., vii., xvii., xviii. 20, xxv., lxvi. 18, cxii., &c.). The book of Job is based on the great acquittal pronounced within (Job xxvii. 6), 'My heart shall not reproach me as long as I live.' In the New Testament the word conscience (*συνείδησις*) has an established place in the writings of St. Paul, and occurs also in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the First Epistle of Peter. But that which the word signifies, an abiding inward consciousness whereby right and wrong may be distinguished and conduct judged,

is necessary to the understanding of the teaching and influence of Jesus. 'The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light ; but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness !' (Matt. vi. 22-3). When they who crucified Christ were 'pricked to heart' (Acts ii. 37) there is no explanation but the accusing judgement of conscience responding to the appeal of Peter.

St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans, makes the ground of his universal message the universal consciousness of sin. They that have not the law, and they that have, are alike subject to the excusing or accusing witness within (cp. Rom. i. 18, 19, ii. 14-5).

In the Epistle to the Hebrews the end of the salvation offered in Christ Jesus is the cleansing of the 'conscience of sins' (Heb. ix. 9-14, x. 4 ; &c.). A 'good conscience' (1 Tim. i. 5 : cp. iii. 9 ; Heb. xiii. 18, &c.) is the condition to be desired and to be maintained. Fidelity to its voice, jealousy of everything which would prejudice or pervert the judgement, is the key-note of Paul's settlement of scruples of any kind (cp. 1 Cor. x. ; Rom. xiv.).

Such, then, is the function of man's moral nature to which Christianity makes its appeal, and to which it refers as witness to the truth. It is in confidence of the ultimate issue of this appeal that the hopes of the future triumph of the kingdom of God rest. It is the reaction from within to this truth from without which becomes crucial. Not that it is admitted that any consensus could banish the case from the court ; but that the evidence of results has been and will be to demonstrate the divine fitness of the New Testament method of moral regeneration. There are those, of course, who contest this challenge. Without fully discussing such contentions,<sup>1</sup> which will only be settled by the story of the ages, let us remember :

1. No denial is made of the attainment and contributions of non-Christian thought in the matter of the moral problems of life. Their insufficiency is maintained.

2. Christianity is not responsible for the facts of the world we live in ; but the Christian method of dealing with those problems claims to be the noblest and most hopeful.

3. The perversions and errors of sections or periods of Christendom are less than its advancements, and if in plain contradiction

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Davison, p. 140 ff.

to the teaching given are of no condemnation but to the perpetrators.

4. It is maintained that the Christian ideal commends itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God; that it appeals to and illuminates man's moral nature, while it 'deepens, purifies, strengthens, and renews' that authoritative control within. The immediate result of the spiritual sovereignty of Christianity was the creation of a conscience in religion as thus described, and with it the rise of a higher social and civil order that still awaits its consummation.



## CHAPTER XI

### *GRACE AND VIRTUE; CHRISTIAN DUTIES*<sup>1</sup>

TWO questions arise from the foregoing chapter which are closely allied :

1. What is the relation between conduct as inwardly approved and its actual performance ?

2. What are the particular acts or habits which result from the Christian interpretation of life ?

1. Since conscience is that function of judgment by which moral issues are decided, and which is associated with its own peculiar and special emotional effects of approval or disapproval, joy or remorse, how may the good be achieved and evil avoided ? Conscience is not sufficient of itself for moral direction, but needs the external illumination and development ; neither is it sufficient for the achievement of the good.

<sup>1</sup> Martensen, §§ 71-112 ; Newman Smyth, Part I. Chap. IV., Part II. Chap. II. & III. ; Dorner, Div. II. Sec. III. ; Mackenzie, Book II. Chap. IV. ; Muirhead, Book IV. Chap. II. ; D'Arcy, Chap. X. ; Kilpatrick, *Christian Character* ; Knight, *The Christian Ethic*.

The first question has already been answered partially in considering Christ's teaching in regard to the moral conflict.<sup>1</sup> The essential qualities of inward character upon which depend personal participation in the Christian ethical scheme were there referred to. The appeal is made to the insufficiency and failure of man's moral endeavour to satisfy the aspirations of the heart after moral excellence. The means whereby that insufficiency and failure are most impressively demonstrated is the ideal as set forth in Jesus Christ, and all He claims to be to men involves the whole range of Christian experience.<sup>2</sup> The grace of the Holy Spirit as the agent of man's salvation and sanctification, the atonement as the basis of that reconciliation with God, belong to theology. Christian ethics declares them to be essential for moral energy and hope, and makes its departure from them as received. The doctrines have ethical aspects and vindication, but these are over the border line of the ethical study of the inner life—viz. that attitude of mind and will and affection created by the acceptance of these truths.

Within the realm of the inner life morally dynamic forces are brought into existence

<sup>1</sup> Chap. IX.

<sup>2</sup> Vide Wace, *Christianity and Morality*.

unique in history. God as the comprehensive object of all personal relations, Christ as the mediator between man's actual condition and that in which the ideal can be realized, the Holy Spirit as the agent of that inward transformation—these are the great theological assumptions taken over into Christian ethics. They may be relegated to the background in estimates of Christian duty which begin and end with particular actions ; but they are nevertheless the soil and atmosphere in which alone Christian character can grow and thrive. Hence so-called religious duties are not a special class of obligation, but the necessary and fundamental 'means of grace' whereby all duties receive their truest interpretation and sanctity, and whereby man is equipped to fulfil them. The finest susceptibility to moral issues, and noblest desire after moral excellence, have been associated with such an interpretation of life, and practical and particular habits whereby the inward and spiritual life is maintained are of first importance.

2. What forms of conduct actually result therefrom ? What are the Christian virtues ? When we emerge from the sphere of spiritual experience into the common activities of the world, what are those features of character whereby we seek to commend the cultivation of such a religious

life on ethical grounds ? What are the traits of character common to other theories of the basis of goodness, and what are the peculiar and specific traits of Christian character ? The questions emphasize a contrast between grace and virtue. Grace conveys a distinctly religious implication. It refers to the divine favour as the source of that which is pleasing in character. Virtue does not imply such a necessity in the ordinary use of the term. From the Christian standpoint virtue and grace are really dependent and consequent the one upon the other. Virtue is the outcome of grace. Virtues are graces. When once the spirit in man has come into vital communion with God through Christ, that inward state contains the Christian character in embryo. Therein is the promise and potency of all forms of goodness :

All is, if I have grace to use it so,  
As ever in my great Task-master's eye.

Hence the mystic precepts and exhortations of the New Testament. Christ offers Himself as ' the Way, the Truth, and the Life ' (John xiv. 6). The appropriation of and participation in His life and death are of greatest moment (John vi. 53). The figure of the vine represents the importance of the maintenance of mystical union

with Himself (John xv.). Love as the active principle of such communion has supreme value. It comprehends all law (Mark xii. 30-1), and is the bond between Christ and His disciples (John xiv. 15, &c. ; xxi. 15, &c.).

The New Testament writers all represent this as the effective element of Christian character (e.g. 1 Pet. i. 8 ; 1 John iv. 8 ; Rom. v. 5 ; 2 Cor. v. 14 ; Gal. v. 22 ; Eph. iii. 17 ; Jude 21, &c.). In it is the complete expression of the potentialities of duty to our fellow men (Mark xii. 31 ; Rom. xiii. 10 ; Matt. v. 44 ; 1 Cor. xiii. ; Gal. v. 14, &c.). So that this twofold aspect of love to God and man expresses the continuity of inward and outward goodness, grace and virtue.

Hence the importance of cultivating that inner life which is the root of all moral excellence. It is from that *sanctum sanctorum* that the Christian comes forth, adorned with that which keeps for him the name of graces or fruits of the Spirit, but which are virtues which can be observed by men and should win their admiration. 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance : against such there is no law' (Gal. v. 23 : cp. Eph. v. 9). Thus also St. Paul writes, ' Finally,

brethren, whatsoever things are true . . . honourable . . . just . . . pure . . . lovely . . . of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things' (i.e. take account of them, reckon them yours to be attained).<sup>1</sup> But he adds, 'The things which ye both learned and received and heard and saw in me, these things do: and the God of peace shall be with you' (Phil. iv. 8-9).

The two questions with which we started would therefore best be answered by a classification of the Christian virtues or graces. The basis of that must be the objective conditions of moral life; but since the importance of personal relation to God is paramount, in considering the Christian scheme of virtues it becomes the starting point of character rather than the climax, as in the rational explanation of goodness. It is the *fons et origo* of good deeds. Then follow virtues or obligations arising from the natural or material conditions of life and the wider circle of social duties.

The use of the word virtue suggests a possible misconception. It is the name usually given to express the approval of an observer. It implies an excess of goodness beyond the demand of duty. But from the inwardness of Christian

<sup>1</sup> λογίζεσθε.

duty there is no room for such excess or margin. It is true that above the level of legal restraints of society there are innumerable acts for which no law can make provision, and in regard to others existing law may be defective, and here is scope ordinarily for virtue; but from the Christian standpoint virtue and duty are one (Luke xvii. 10).

Again, the term *a* virtue is used of some particular excellence. It is the good quality of certain acts abstracted from any particular circumstances in which it may be manifested. These are various, yet the quality of the conduct has a certain uniformity. Thus courage and truthfulness have many aspects and occasions. Circumstances alone explain whether a virtue may not be perilously near a vice. If we do not allow, with Alexander Pope, 'All vice is virtue overgrown,' yet the tempering of the whole nature is the secret of noblest character, and only by actual contact with events can the complicated adjustments of virtues be demonstrated. Aristotle's doctrine of the 'mean,' the Stoic maxim 'nothing in excess,' are inadequate apart from an actual order, an end in human affairs, and an accepted ideal.

Further, since the ideal is realized only by constant progress, any fixed and complete de-



scription of virtues is impossible. The method of the New Testament is to give examples or illustrations for practical direction, which are liable to modified interpretation in altered circumstance according to the 'analogy of duty' or the deeper principles of the Christian system of which such rules are an embodiment.

For all these reasons a classification of the variety of particular actions approved is liable to be unsatisfactory. There is danger of arbitrary and artificial division which results in the overlapping of classes and modes of good conduct. Yet from earliest times it has been attempted.

Socrates reduced all virtues to knowledge. We have seen reason for repudiating this in the light of facts of moral consciousness, although the connexion is very close between duty and enlightenment of conscience.

Plato, with greater subtlety, added courage, temperance, justice; but preserved wisdom as still first in his list. The defectiveness of overlapping is therefore apparent, while justice must be made to mean much more than is usually implied by the term to cover the virtues for which it would have to stand in such a classification. These did, however, form the basis of cardinal virtues in the middle ages, with their contrast to the deadly sins of pride,



avarice, anger, gluttony, unchastity, envy, vainglory.<sup>1</sup>

Aristotle added to Plato's list minor excellences, but always with the colour of Athenian citizenship. Such qualities as 'magnificence' and 'high mindedness' hardly commend themselves to modern good taste, any more than to the gospel of humility and gentleness. Benevolence had hardly a place in the Greek civic ideal of goodness.

Modern classifications are usually more extensive. The meagreness of naturalistic ethics is manifest in the threefold maxim, 'Be strong, be temperate, be truthful,'<sup>2</sup> and, indeed, can hardly be called a classification at all. The more elaborate inductions of Herbert Spencer include the explicit recognition of much that is the common standard of Christian and non-Christian classifications alike. The difference arises rather in interpretation of the altruistic or other-regarding excellences, and the reduction of all goodness to prudence and social restraint. But no classification can perfectly exclude virtues of one class in application to another.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vide Sidgwick, *History of Ethics*, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> Leslie Stephen, *op. cit.* p. 174.

<sup>3</sup> A very comprehensive attempt is given in Muirhead's *Ethics*, p. 201.

Courage has intellectual as well as social obligations. Truthfulness has meaning for almost every department into which man's moral obligations might be divided. In the varied forms of impartiality, frankness, fidelity, sincerity, it takes the colour of actual occasions for the exercise of a virtue which is yet one.

Still, it is not possible to avoid all description of the concrete acts deemed worthy of Christian character, for the following reasons :

1. In the actual affairs of men the existence of other standards is felt in the partial and piecemeal maxims of localities and classes and individual prejudices, rather than in complete systems or principles. Much of excellence is assimilated and acknowledged by Christian truth, and it is sometimes in particular virtues and duties that the contrast of Christian teaching is most obvious.

2. The particular forms of conduct are a real part of the battleground of moral systems.

3. Moralists acknowledge the indebtedness of the world to Christianity even when the Christian system as a whole, the root or source of the Christian ideal, is disowned.

4. It is through these actual forms of good the attraction of the Christian system may win personal allegiance. They form avenues through

which the interest and attention of mankind may be attracted to seek the central life within.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the Christian religion is first and foremost to awaken the moral nature ; to create that 'habit of choice'<sup>2</sup> which makes character consistent and steadfast ; to bring to light obscured virtues in their true loveliness, and not to add a distinct and separate list. Still, the advent of Christ has brought its own distinct elements as a result of that revelation of the Father, and it has deepened the interpretation of excellences of character already acknowledged. The so-called 'heathen virtues'<sup>3</sup> are neither 'splendid vices,' nor are they necessarily antagonistic. The Christian extra in regard to these is in inward elements and fuller scope. Thus it has been said<sup>4</sup> that Christianity threw patriotism in the shade, as also the quest of

<sup>1</sup> Any attempt to evade it is impossible. Thus, for instance, Newman Smyth rightly objects to the subjective classification of Wuttke, who reduces all moral activity to the fundamental forms of duty—to spare, to appropriate, to form. This is based upon Wuttke's interpretation of moral activity, as a relation between the subject and object of action. It is far too rarified an atmosphere and too abstract a view of practical virtues.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle's definition of virtue, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II.

<sup>3</sup> Vide Wesley's *Sermons*.

<sup>4</sup> Prof. William Knight, *The Christian Ethic*, Chap. I. § 4.

speculative truth; yet it was in the interests of philanthropy and the moral elevation of the masses. This is historically accurate. The religious basis of revelation superseded the speculations of philosophy, and provided a programme and stimulus for practical benevolence. But on the other hand, no greater impetus in search of truth was ever given than the Christian revelation, and patriotism never meant more than it has meant with Christian interpretation of philanthropy and brotherhood. On the other hand, there are elements of patriotism, as conceived apart from Christianity, which are vainglorious and cruel with regard to other races, to which Christianity is diametrically opposed. Patriotism had no glory 'by reason of the glory that surpasseth.' It was eclipsed and obscured that its new meaning might be seen as a subordinate phase of philanthropy in the evolution of the moral ideal of the race.

Similarly, in the use of the term gentleman, and the contrast between Christian behaviour and ordinary courtesy, it has been said that good manners are the shadows of virtues. They may, however, from the Christian standpoint, be but the ghosts of dead excellences, the empty and deceptive guise of self-control and regard for others—virtues run

to seed in formal etiquette. The conception of a gentleman illustrated in Chesterfield's letters may but reflect adroit conformity to prevailing customs, and be associated with vices of the time. Yet Christianity has made its imperishable contribution to chivalry and good manners and has still its claim to a deeper and truer explanation of the secret of worthily pleasing behaviour (cp. Rom. xv. 2 ; 1 Pet. iii. 8 ; 1 Cor. xiii. 5). In self-respect and respect of all men, which result from the Christian estimate of humanity and human life, is the secret of due regard for what may otherwise become trivialities or insincerities of conduct.

So the corollary of the human brotherhood, attached as a necessary inference from the divine Fatherhood, has affected social relations in all directions. It has alike kindled, sanctioned, and restrained the social aspirations of mankind. Liberty, equality, fraternity, may be the enraged demand of social revolt, unless tempered with reasonable patience, self-restraint, and gentleness. It is this combination which has marked the reforms distinctly Christian. In the emancipations of the slave, in the advocacy of peace, and in institutions of charity and benevolence, the claims of every man upon society and the universal inclusion of all mankind in the scheme of the

kingdom of God have far-reaching results in the virtues which Christianity commends and enforces, and which are international in their scope.

In the relationship of the sexes and chivalry to women and care of children, in all humanitarian reform, and the exercise of pity to the weak and defenceless, we have elements of ethical teaching. These are the outcome of Christian views of purity, and of the sanctity of all natural relations. In modern socialism we see the combination of these with a deeper apprehension of the solidarity of the race. The intense individualism of the eighteenth century has given place to ideals of organic unity in the community. The leavening and restraining influence of Christianity is maintained. In safeguarding obscured rights, in firm fidelity to methods of reform which are themselves ethically justifiable, the Christian conscience has been ever true, both to the past and the future.

It has been often alleged that the Christian influence has been too restraining and conservative. The charge may be met with the defence that, as in the cases of the emancipation of the slave and monogamy, so in all prospective reform, such as the temperance reform, or the abolition of war, the method is one of growth

rather than revolution. The Christian method of reform is distinctly ethical, and therefore individual, and not externally coercive. Hence it may come to pass that even sections of the professedly Christian community may be behind the level of moral progress by reason of circumstances creative of prejudice.

But the conception of the kingdom of God as a progressive realization creates a conviction of a necessary coherence, stability, and continuity in the moral development of the race. Christianity has always cherished the idea of the fulfilment of a divine order and programme, and hence a gradual maturity and dependence in every new epoch of moral growth.

It is only with the remembrance of these limitations that the value of any attempt to particularize the elements of Christian character can be of service. The task tends to resolve itself into a statement of Christian duties. Like the growing and spreading branches of a tree that interlace, yet bear a common fruit, the divergent applications of the Christian ideal become increasingly complicated. We may regard the abstracted dispositions, or enumerate the actual forms of duty; we may examine the methods of discipline, or the ways of voluntary cultivation: all are methods of treating the practical



side of Christian ethics<sup>1</sup>; but it is the unending task and permanent duty of the Christian Church. To be a Christian is to be committed to a career whose individual goal is Christian character (Rom. viii. 29), and that means the fulfilment of the kingdom of God as the collective goal of ethical endeavour. As the outcome of the specific features of Christian teaching, and its interpretation of the actual conditions of human life, some such preliminary scheme of Christian character may be suggested as the following.

1. *In relation to God.*

(i) Here stands pre-eminently the duty of the acknowledgement of the supreme authority and power of goodness. That inward disposition which we term—

(1) *Reverence*,<sup>2</sup> is the emotional attitude in regard to such a conviction ;

(2) *Obedience*, is the volitional readiness to act in conformity with that which has such authority (Matt. vii. 26 ; John xiv. 15, &c.).

(ii) There are also inward dispositions arising out of the conditions of the moral conflict.

(1) There are those which have been referred to<sup>3</sup>—*penitence, faith, love, self-surrender, hope.*

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Dean Church, *Discipline of Christian Character* ; Kilpatrick, *Christian Character*.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. xxv. 14 ; Prov. i. 7, &c. ; Rom. iii. 18 &c.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. IX

(2) Associated with these general dispositions are those which belong to the disciplinary process of life. Thus—

(a) *Temptation* has a definiteness and emphasis peculiar to the New Testament. That which ‘seems like a fight’ to coolest impartiality is the struggle upon which eternal issues depend. It is the means of developing graces of *strength* and *fidelity* or steadfastness, and the duties of *prayerfulness* and *watchfulness* have a prominent place.

(b) *Suffering* has a distinct ministry in the Christian scheme of character. The disposition with which the Christian faces its ‘sweet uses’ is unique. As sometimes the result of wrongdoing suffering has an ethical value; but as disengaged from all thought of penal consequences, and when incapable of such explanation, the mystery of suffering is illuminated with the light of the cross (2 Cor. iv. 17). *Patience, endurance, resignation, humility, sympathy* shine in the cluster of graces that are the outcome of suffering. In no way has Christian saintliness attained to greater beauty and attractiveness than in the sanctification of suffering. If the apotheosis of suffering be denied, its transfiguration is acknowledged. Whether it be in the noble courage of martyrdom

or the self-forgetful cheerfulness of those who have born the ills that flesh is heir to, we have innumerable examples of more than Stoic calmness, and a hopefulness that Stoicism never knew.

(iii) In this connexion must also be mentioned so-called religious duties, though as we have seen, all duties are religious from the Christian standpoint. These are—

(1) Devotional exercises of meditation and prayer.

(2) Duties of church life and observance of worship.

(3) Confession of faith and missionary zeal.

2. *Duties that centre chiefly in self.* So complete is the altruism of the kingdom of God, the antagonism of duties to self and others tends to disappear. The ethically destructive selfishness with its social disintegration has no place in the Christian ideal. No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself (Rom. xiv. 7-8). Life is a sacred trust, and no palliation is found in the New Testament for suicide.<sup>1</sup> It is not by distinct statement but rather by silence that the case has to be judged from the Bible. The principles of the New Testament all make such

<sup>1</sup> For a history of opinions see Lecky, *History of European Morals*, Vol. II. pp. 46-65.

an exit from life impossible to the believer in Christ. Life is a stewardship, a post not to be quitted in cowardice. Its ills have to be met by patient endurance and hope. To interfere in the process of discipline, to cancel our own indentures in the apprenticeship of life is unjustifiable. It is a wrong to the community, to whom our service and example are necessary, and even when only suffering may remain as an opportunity for the service and discipline of others, life is still sacred. Far different is the case of life laid down in the service of humanity or sacrificed in fidelity to moral interests. Apart from such demands there stands first the duty of self-preservation, especially in care of the body.

(i) In *self-control*.

(1) Sins of the flesh with peculiarly repellent punishment have ever had vehement condemnation (Gal. vi. 7-8 ; 1 Tim. v. 24.) That the body is 'the temple of the living God' (2 Cor. vi. 16) has enforced the meaning of Christian *purity* or *chastity* (Rom. vi. 19, 8 ; 1 Cor. vi. 18-9). Against the vices that have disfigured the decadent empire of Rome or modern society, the voice of the New Testament has been clear in its witness.

(2) So also *sobriety* and temperance or

abstinence has its place. Rom. xiv. gives a local and temporary example of the use of principles which have general application to the use of alcohol and of other ways of temptation to excess (1 Cor. ix. 27). *Fasting* has a subordinate place in this connexion as a voluntary method of self-discipline for spiritual ends.<sup>1</sup>

(ii) *Positively*, we have the duty of *care for the body* in regard for health. Cleanliness, nourishment, exercise, recreation, have not only their place as parts of Christian duty, but where there is a lack of opportunity for these in the social order, the Christian Church has eagerly entered into the task of providing them as a part of its philanthropic programme.

It would be possible to expand this brief statement and illustrate it by reference to the New Testament. It is, however, the outcome of that estimate of bodily life which is intimately associated with the doctrine of the Incarnation.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, in condemnation of conformity to the world is condemned all such engrossment in these things as makes them the end of life.<sup>3</sup> Eagerness of desire for material possession, observance of fashion, or love of

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vi. 16 ff. ; Acts xiii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 20 ; Phil. i. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. xii. 1-2.

pleasure, have called forth constant protest. If, sometimes in excess, the witness of a Savanorola or St. Francis, of Puritan or Quaker, has been true to the principle that the 'life is more than meat and the body than raiment.' Unworldliness was a marked feature of the eighteenth century revival, and has an abiding place in Christian character, affecting all habits of bodily life.<sup>1</sup>

(iii) *Self-development*. As far as the personal aspect of duty is concerned, beyond care for the body this concerns the *cultivation of mind*. The educational progress of the world has to a wonderful extent been linked with the extension of the Christian religion. If some have used language disparaging what is termed culture, it has no justification in the Christian estimate of the intellect.<sup>2</sup> As we have seen, knowledge has a peculiar place in moral development, and all knowledge of history, science, and literature gives greater scope and meaning to character, and occasion for Christian discipline (2 Cor. x. 5). In these and other ways which belong to man's social relations the duty of self-development or self-realization is the problem of life. According to particular vocation and

<sup>1</sup> John xvii. 15; Luke xii. 15 ff., ix. 25; 1 Cor. xiv. 12-20;  
1 John ii. 16-7.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. 'Religion and Culture,' *Preacher's Magazine*, June 1903.

opportunity, each man has the task of adjusting various claims upon his time and energy.<sup>1</sup> It is thus the art of living has its elevation, and holiness its beauty ; for the infinite variety and freedom of self-realization is the distinctive dignity of human life.

3. *Duties to others.* Two points have to be remembered.

(i) All right conduct towards ourselves is so far service to the community. The chief part of our duty to others centres in personal fidelity to the laws of the kingdom of heaven.<sup>2</sup>

(ii) All acts distinctly for the good of others, if they are to have that essential quality which makes them Christian, are the outcome of *love* arising from a deep apprehension of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men.<sup>3</sup>

But passing to the various forms of that comprehensive virtue, which by reason of its vitality must be revealed in distinct acts, the forms of Christian duty to others are : (1) *general* ; (2) *special*.

(1) *General*, i.e. such as apply to all relations of men, and all classes of society.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 24 : cp. Dr. Maclaren's *Sermons preached at Manchester*, Vol. III. Sermon 1.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. iii. 20, R.V. : cp. iii. 12 ; Gal. ii. 19-20 ; Rev. i. 6.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. xiii. : cp. p. 191 ff. above.



(a) *Justice, truthfulness, courage.* These are of broad and universal acceptance, though they admit of full examination in the light of Christian principle and application to actual affairs of life. Thus the term 'justice,' which meant in Aristotle<sup>1</sup> much that is covered by the Christian term righteousness,<sup>2</sup> has broadened in its own general use under Christian influence and the growing moral consciousness of men; so that that which was once only the endeavour of Christian benevolence is now sought as a social right in the name of justice. But that Christian benevolence does not mean doing as a favour that which has historically a more primitive obligation, is shown by the inclusion of 'justice' as an essential part of Christian character (Col. iv. 1; Tit. i. 8, &c.). It has been as a growth transferred into more congenial soil. Truthfulness, likewise, has innumerable shades of meaning in different relations of life,<sup>3</sup> yet its plainest particular meaning is not omitted in the New Testament precepts (Matt. v. 37; Eph. iv. 25, &c.). In its fullest scope it becomes identified with the fundamental inwardness of the Christian interpretation of all moral goodness. Courage,

<sup>1</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book V.

<sup>2</sup> Vide p. 203 above.

<sup>3</sup> Vide p. 233 above.

in its Christian interpretation, is reinforced and elevated by the addition of intelligent conviction and loftiest moral purpose as contrasted with the recklessness of brute force (cp. Luke xii. 5 ; 1 Cor. xvi. 13).

(b) But there are certain virtues more specifically Christian in regard to general social relations. Thus *forbearance, meekness, forgiveness, contentment or cheerfulness, and courtesy*,<sup>1</sup> express the changing form in growing externality of that spirit of love and self-surrender which it is the work of Christianity to produce, as a means of highest social cohesion and as corrective of the natural animosities and divisions of mankind. They are forms of *humility* (cp. Matt. v. 5 ; Col. iii. 12 ; Phil. iv. 11 ; Rom. xii. 8), which is the great Christian corrective of anti-social egoism.

(c) *Benevolence or philanthropy* is the crowning social virtue of Christianity. It is the active side of social character, as those of the previous group are largely passive or restraining. It saves humility from becoming servility or apathy, by the creation of a personal sense of social value. Its robust and fruitful character is seen in the Christian forms of altruism which are not merely direct and personal, but collective in

<sup>1</sup> Cp. above, p. 235.

their scope, and active, even militant, in spirit. The 'enthusiasm for humanity' does not crush, but creates, a true estimate of personal value by reason of its call to philanthropic endeavour.

(2) *Special*, i.e. those which belong to the organized institutions of society and require separate treatment.

Here, therefore, it is necessary to pause. Such a scheme of Christian character as that given is the merest outline. The classification of New Testament synonyms with an analysis of the graces described, the consideration of their bearing upon modern times, the description of subtle forms of evil against which they are meant to guard, cannot be given within the compass of the present survey of the subject.

## CHAPTER XII.

### *SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS<sup>1</sup>*

THE limitation of duties to God, ourselves, or others is only partial, since they are only so limited as a matter of accent or emphasis. They really are interpenetrating and allied. So also those duties to others which have been considered separately as general are not really separated from the organized institutions of society. It is in these institutions that moral life is exhibited, and by them partially moulded. It is in the many possible positions which various individuals may occupy that every virtue has a special quality or importance, and the apparently conflicting claims of each are reconciled and interpreted.

Hence it is necessary to say something as to what Christian ethics teaches in regard to

<sup>1</sup> Martensen, Vol. II. ; Dorner, Div. III. ; Newman Smyth, Pt. II. Chaps. III., IV. ; Shailer Matthews, *Social Teaching of Jesus* ; Westcott, *Social Aspects of Christianity* ; Peabody, *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*.

the actual institutions of social life. Man is essentially social.<sup>1</sup> The kingdom of God suggests a social order.<sup>2</sup> We have to consider now the agreement or contrast of the existing order and the kingdom of God, and the relative or special duties of the individual. That there is both agreement and contrast we have already incidentally seen. There are social conditions of life which Christian ethics accepts and yet seeks to modify. It is the subjugation of the world, so far as it is antagonistic to the kingdom of God, at which Christianity aims. It seeks to transmute social relations into highest value and meaning. The individual created anew, after the image of God in Christ, is meant to react upon his environment, and Christianity is distinctly social in its bearing upon human life. It is by its very fidelity to individuality that it attains the highest social ideal. It aims at the development of highest social capacities in man, and the most comprehensive redemption of mankind. Salvation neither means an isolated and detached life any more than the kingdom of God means an unethical social order. No decree of a senate<sup>3</sup> can enthrone Christ as

<sup>1</sup> Vide above, p. 78 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Above, pp. 149-56.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. as at Florence, vide Stubbs, *Christ and Economics*, Chap. II.

King of the people apart from personal surrender of each citizen, though the laws of a state may be framed in harmony with His teaching. It is rather from the 'least to the greatest,' from within outwards, from the unit to the mass, the leavening process takes place.

But whatever defects and blemishes exist in any social order—domestic, industrial, civic, political, or ecclesiastical—there are certain elements that are acknowledged as fundamental and constitutional to humanity and principles, according to which the construction and administration of men's affairs should conform in order to be in harmony with the Christian ideal.

Christ propounded no scheme of political economy. His silence concerning many questions to which men clamour for a direct answer is significant ; yet that there were latent in His revelation social forces and ideas of the mightiest kind is a matter of historic demonstration, and to formulate some Christian social theory is the irresistible impulse of our times.

New times demand new measures and new men ;  
The world advances, and in time outgrows  
The laws that in our father's day were best ;  
And doubtless after us, some purer scheme  
Will be shaped out by wiser men than we,  
Made wiser by the steady growth of truth.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. R. Lowell.

To interpret an age to itself, to afford guidance and hope for the moral endeavour of every generation, is the work of Christianity. If from time to time some fresh phase of that endeavour is made prominent, it will be found there is in Christianity that which will supply the needful direction. And so in the social aspirations of our time is fitness for fuller understanding of the social teaching of Jesus, and an urgent need to enforce those principles without which we are convinced social schemes must wreck true social well-being. It is not possible here to describe at length the growth and character of modern social theories of the last half-century.<sup>1</sup> The significance of such names as Saint Simon, Fourier, Robert Owen, Karl Marx, can be found elsewhere. The place and value of such writers as Mazzini, Carlyle, Ruskin, William Morris, Tolstoi, cannot be given here. But there is no test of Christianity more really applied to-day than whether it is adequate to the solution of the social questions and problems of the times. There may be aversion from or distrust towards Christianity among some who are most eager reformers, but we are convinced that we must christianize socialism, and so far socialize Christianity as to bring out its inherent social

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Peabody, *op. cit.* Chap. I.



teaching, to emphasize its lofty social aims and powerful motive. There is evidence of such an effort, and the most earnest evangelism of the day is associated with social service.

There is no real conflict between individualism and socialism as interpreted by Christ. Individualism is no barren luxury of self-culture, no idle dream of unserviceable egoism. It is self-realization, for the fulfilment of a recognized destiny in the ordered kingdom of God ; an achievement of truest individuality in truest service to the community. Its dominant note is self-sacrifice rather than self-assertion. How complete that self-realisation becomes in the kingdom of God is seen, the more fully the bases of unity in the race are discovered in Christ. But this will be manifest as we consider the widening circles of social life. It is only needed further here to state once more that no socialism can be tolerated by the Christian teaching which does not aim at the highest individuality. Social organization can never be an end in itself. Its end is the attainment of the perfection of the individual according to the loftiest possibilities of personal character. Not only so, but the aim of Christianity is the regeneration and reformation of social institutions, not their destruction.

Thus, for instance, Bishop Westcott has pointed out<sup>1</sup> how on the one hand the Franciscan movement erred on the side of the destruction of individuality in an attempt to reorganize society, rather than take the institutions of society as given; while Quakerism over-emphasized individuality and showed a disposition to ignore the partial embodiment past and present of the principles of the kingdom of God in organized society. Such criticism in no way lessens the value of the service rendered by both those great movements toward the christianization of the social life of their time. The protest of Francis of Assissi against selfish luxury, and the achievements of the Society of Friends in regard to prison reform, slave emancipation, and peace, are for ever memorable.

The three concentric circles of normal relations to social institutions are domestic, industrial or commercial, and political.

## I. THE FAMILY

Any attempt to frame a purely individualistic scheme of ethics is at once condemned by the natural and inevitable social conditions of personal existence. Natural and moral ties are

<sup>1</sup> *Social Aspects of Christianity*, Part II.

blended in the primary conditions of birth and association in family life.

No theory of social order can overleap that first fact of human life. Any theory of duty and of society which does violence to the hereditary instincts of the race can never secure a permanent place in history. The Christian ideal is so far natural that it recognizes in the evolutionary traditions of the race that which is prophetic of its highest attainment.

The germ of altruistic feeling has been traced far back to co-operation in nature. Though it may be assuming much in the interpretation of nature to find more than symbolic evidence of regard for others ; yet, 'except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth by itself alone.' Again, to trace the growth of altruistic feeling through the struggle for the life of others in sexual and parental instinct has fascination ;<sup>1</sup> yet for us it suffices that the seal of highest holiest meaning has been put by Jesus Christ upon the primal social relations of life. His interpretation of their duty and meaning is at once natural and spiritual.

*Marriage, parentage, brotherhood* are the normal relationships created in the family, and the teaching of the New Testament fully

<sup>1</sup> Vide Kidd, *Social Evolution* ; Drummond, *Ascent of Man*.

recognizes their natural and fundamental character. 'In the family, *living for others* becomes the strict corollary of the patent fact, *we live by others*.' 'A perfect family includes three primary relations, those of husband and wife, of parent and child, of brothers and sisters. And these three relations reveal the essential laws of all human fellowship. They are . . . the original sacrament of society. They reveal to us the inherent incompleteness of the individual life completed in a typical union: that is the idea of marriage. They reveal to us the correlative responsibilities of government and devotion hallowed by love: that is the idea of fatherhood. They reveal to us the inalienable ties of a common nature in the direct connexion of blood: that is the idea of brotherhood.'<sup>1</sup>

1. *Marriage*. Monogamy has been recognized as the upward tendency of the sexual relation and other forms are acknowledged as decadent, rather than normal modes of primitive family institution.<sup>2</sup> Christ, with no ascetic disparagement, has hallowed natural affection in the relationship of married life (John ii.). He taught its limitation

<sup>1</sup> Westcott, op. cit. p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Vide Duprat, *Morals: The Psycho-Sociological Bases of Ethics*, § 89, &c.

to earthly life (Matt. xxii. 23-30); but also its superiority to all other ties, and that it should be broken for one cause alone (Mark x. 7 ff. ; Matt. xix. 3 ff.). The exceptional justification of celibacy (Matt. xix. 29 : cp. 1 Cor. vii.) does not refute this statement. The New Testament contains direct exhortations concerning the relative duties of the married state, and highest interpretations of the symbolism of marriage (Eph. v. ; 1 Tim. iii. ; Rev. xix. xx.). Associated with the doctrine of the Nativity the Western ideas of chivalry contrast with the customs and teaching of Mohammedanism and the East.

2. *The parental relation.* The Christian message to mankind has developed these innate instincts of human nature to their highest capacity, and enforced their use as socially educative in most direct fashion. The meaning of sonship and fatherhood are symbols of relationship between man and God (Luke xv. 11-32 ; Rom. viii. 15-25 ; 1 John iii. 13-24, &c.). The sacredness of genealogy and birth-right among the Jews developed to our ideal home life in Western Christianity, by which character has been nurtured of the highest quality for public service. Far removed from the mere duty of a proletariat is the conception of home life under the direction of the New

Testament (Col. iii. 20 ff. ; 1 Tim. iii. 12 ; Eph. vi. 1 ff. ; 2 Cor. xii. 14).

3. *Brotherhood*. So completely is the thought of mere natural kinship eclipsed in the application of the principle of brotherhood to the wider circle of humanity that it is almost impossible to find any exclusive exhortation concerning this relationship in the New Testament. But the implication of the sacredness of kinship is not thereby less emphatic. The expansion of the sentiments of kindness<sup>1</sup> does not evaporate the claims of flesh and blood ; but it does also save them from irrational and despotic control of the benevolent instinct. In the cultivation of *friendship, hospitality* (Rom. xii. 13 ; Heb. xiii. 2 ; John xv. 12), and service to the wider family of fellow disciples or public life may be found a 'calling of God' ; but it may happen more often than not, that these wider claims are not sacrificed but concentrated in the narrower range of family fidelity (John i. 41, xi. ; Acts xii. 13).

The practical application is very plain. Not only is there need for direct individual observance of the duties thus discoverable in Christian teaching, but also for the extension of their observance. We have to maintain the ideals

<sup>1</sup> Cp. above, pp. 155-6.

of family relations in the face of reactionary tendency and disintegration. There is in many ways need to resist social theories and habits that would tend to destroy the truest social instincts of mankind, and to evade the primal social obligations which are the bases of all that is best in civilization. Further, while conditions of social life make talk of home life as here described well-nigh a cruel mockery to some, every sentiment of patriotism and philanthropy must be enlisted to create the opportunity for the sweetening of these springs of all social influences.

## II. INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL RELATIONS<sup>1</sup>

For the achievement of that unity and harmony of social relations and the development of character associated therewith, which we believe is the goal to which men must strive, family interest must not be allowed to limit the range of personal duty.<sup>2</sup> The social evolution of industrial and economic systems is a subject by itself. If Christianity had been committed to any form of organized institution, it would inevitably have been superseded. The wrecks of such

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Stubbs, *Christ and Economics*.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Martensen, Vol. II. § 29.



attempts to initiate distinct communities are strewn along the path of human progress, and, if surviving, they have often degenerated into orders and societies in which vested interests of a material kind, have, so to speak, suffocated the original spirit and intention.

The division of labour, and the industrial and economic relations of men, have developed immensely. How far we have travelled from pastoral life to the great organizations of industry and commerce, with systems of limited liability, financial combination, and co-operation, is a story which has not always had its romantic significance made duly prominent. But the relation of rich and poor, of employer and employed, of capital and labour, are problems which have more ethical meaning than is always apprehended. Schemes of reform can only hope for acceptance as ethically approved. The plea and possibility of reform is the outcome of ethical growth. The stability of social order rests in the ethical character of the constituent members of the community.

1. *Christ recognized the pursuits of industrial and commercial life.* He Himself was known as the Carpenter (Mark vi. 3). His followers in several instances pursued their occupation or business (Luke v. 1-10 ; John xxi. ; Acts xviii. 3 ;

1 Cor. iv. 12). He draws His comparisons from circumstances of trade and business—the merchant, the vine-dresser, the fisher—approving fidelity in the use of money as the instrument of business (Matt. xxv. 23-9 ; xiii. 45-9 ; Mark xii. &c.). Fidelity to such relative avocations of life and commercial integrity are constantly enforced (Eph. iv. 28, vi. 5-9 ; Col. iii. 22 ff. ; Rom. xiii. 8), while the practical precepts of the Hebrew proverbs are bound up with the sacred writings of the Gospels.

2. It is equally certain, *Christ set forth a higher estimate of life and men than has ordinarily prevailed in these relations*. Not only in what may be termed pioneer acts of benevolence, but in efforts after the assimilation of all human affairs to the spirit exhibited we see the social temper of Christianity. Men can never be the mere instruments of industrial systems, nor individual acquisition a justifiable end (Matt. xx. 14) ; and fidelity to the sense of stewardship in material possession is crucial (Luke xvi. 11) as a test of character.

3. *Christ recognized the relative discipline of riches and poverty*. Though the responsibility of wealth and its peril have sometimes vehement enforcement (Matt. xix. 23 ff. ; cp. Luke vi. 24 ; James i. 10 ; 1 Tim. vi. 9), yet there is no

confusion as to the incidental character of the possession of wealth (Mark x. 23-4 ; Luke xix. 2 ff. ; 1 Tim. vi. 17-8). Communism, though partially and voluntarily adopted by the early Church at Jerusalem (Acts ii. 44), cannot be commended as a correct interpretation of Christian teaching. Though according to the conditions of prosperity an increasing standard of life as a minimum becomes a possible and legitimate claim ; yet differences of individual capacity, and circumstances of varying prosperity, such as accident, misfortune, famine, and international relations, create constant differences of material well-being and possession of property. These demand, in the administration of any system, principles of brotherhood and humanity. Against covetousness, which ignores these principles and the higher ends of life they involve, Christ uttered His denunciation (Mark vii. 22 ; Luke xii. 13 ff.). And such a spirit may exist in no direct proportion to the amount of earthly possession.

### III. THE STATE

Jesus Christ repudiated an earthly or political kingdom (John vi. 15). He nowhere gives systematic teaching on these matters. Yet much may be inferred from the facts that He

implicitly approved the service of the civil law, and obeyed the local and imperial government. Those voluntary contracts into which men enter by reason of community of interest naturally gave rise to the creation of a public authority to secure the execution of those contracts. Concerning the contentions possible as to the possession of property and inheritance,<sup>1</sup> there is need of restraint and restriction according to code if the civil authority is to assure the privileges of the members of the community. Into the reciprocal rights and obligations of government and governed it is not possible to enter in detail here. The attitude of Jesus Christ, however, is neither one of entire passivity nor active hostility. He bids His disciples reckon with the facts of life in this respect (Matt. v. 25), and, while submitting to authority, enforces its conformity to ideals of which it is the expression and embodiment, however imperfectly (John xviii. 23, xix. 10 ff. ; Matt. xxii. 18-22). The attitude of St. Paul is in agreement with this (Acts xxii. 22 ff. ; Rom. xiii. 1-7, &c.). With regard to the early Church there was a generally passive endurance of the ills suffered at the hands of the Roman emperors in expectation of the apocalyptic deliverance for which they hoped.

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Martensen, Vol. II. § 2.

It was only in later date that problems of Church and State and the powers of 'the keys and the sword' came into view. How profoundly politics and religion have been complicated is immediately suggested by such names as Constantine, Augustine, Aquinas, Cromwell, Zwingli, and William of Orange. The problems are with us still. Whatever the solution of the questions handed on from the industrial or ecclesiastical spheres to the national and political, Christian ethics can neither forgo its hopes nor betray its trust :

The vision of a Christian man,  
In virtue as in stature great,  
Embodied in a Christian state.<sup>1</sup>

There is a representation of the teaching of Christ which despairs of this hope. The non-resisting anarchism of Tolstoi lays utmost stress upon the virtues of charity, pity, fraternity, and meekness. Evil must not be resisted, but on the contrary we must bear with every insult and do even more than is required of us. We must not judge, nor must we have part or lot in any legal judgement, since every man is himself full of faults and has no right to teach others. By taking vengeance we teach others to avenge

<sup>1</sup> Whittier.

themselves.<sup>1</sup> Such would mean the suppression of measures of government protection, the abandonment of the conquest of civilization, and the reversion to servility to brute force. Such a travesty of Christian renunciation can hardly impose on calm judgement, whatever may be its value as an instance of prophetic extravagance. The paradoxes of Christ and His hyperbolic emphasis in inculcating a serviceable spirit must not obscure the rational balance of His whole teaching. He Himself appealed to the principle of justice in procedure, and recognized the necessity of conformity to the divine archetype.

In conclusion, the secret and method of Christ's social ideals is distinctly ethical. The aim of Christianity is to create an apprehension of the deepest, widest, and most vital solidarity of the race. In that way it seeks to eliminate causes of strife and injustice in the social administrations of men. It is not by the creation of an environment of material comfort the golden age will come; but by the creation of individuals of such a character that environment shall, for themselves and others, become assimilated to the highest form of life. That spiritual

<sup>1</sup> Vide Duprat, *op. cit.* p. 141 ff.; Matthews, *op. cit.* Chap. V. : and cp. Tolstoi, *What I believe*, and *The Kingdom of God is within you*.

purpose was never absent from our Lord's life and ministry.

Christianity is not prepared to resign its mission to man in favour of any religion of Humanity which is without foundation in the interpretation of what Humanity means, and which is struck dumb as to the origin of the race and our relation to the Creator. Just where socialistic aspiration craves some 'mystical philanthropy,' Christianity declares itself already pervaded with social meaning of the loftiest, most rational and potent kind. It declares itself both the trustee and champion of the most sacred rights and highest duties of man.







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Title Ethics. History of Man Ethics

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